# THE GLORIOUS GALILEAN

J. W. G. WARD

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# THE GLORIOUS GALILEAN

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# THE GLORIOUS GALILEAN

Imaginary Narratives of some who met with Jesus during his divine life among men

BY
J. W. G. WARD, D.D., LITT.D.

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# FOREWORD

THE story of the divine Son of God is so familiar that many people have almost entirely lost the sense of reverent wonder. On the other hand, there are those who have so idealized the central Figure of the Christian faith that Christ has become for them both shadowy and unreal. It is admittedly difficult to grasp the fact that he suffered and sorrowed, that he knew weariness and disappointment, that he walked the rough paths of daily duty as we do. In a word, we have well-nigh forgotten that he actually lived our life on this earth, and that the people whom he blessed were flesh and blood like ourselves.

In these pages, with fullest reverence, our object has been to make these men and women live again. We have sought their story, as they might tell it, in order that a keener sense of the real divine-human Christ may be awakened. Taking the scriptural records as the basis, we have allowed imagination to play around the facts in the earnest hope that a richer faith in the Living Lord may emerge. It is with this purpose that we send these studies forth on their wider mission.

J. W. G. WARD

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# I

## THE STORY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

IN the dungeon beneath Herod's palace we found him —him, the son of deserts wild, where the winds of heaven blew, and the tempest's rude shock rivaled his forcefulness and power. As our eyes gradually became accustomed to the gloom of the prison, we were able to appreciate better what this man had suffered. He was seated with his head in his hands. Dejection had bound him with its strong fetters. But at our greeting he arose. His noble head was upraised, and he flung out his arms as though he would free himself once more from the impalpable bonds that held him.

"You have sought me out thus. Do you come in friendship, or with some other purpose?"

"Both," we replied. "With a regard bordering on affection, and with a request that only you can grant we have intruded on your grief."

He smiled at our words, inquiring, "And what may that be? There is but little now in my power to bestow."

"And yet that little may mean much," we urged. "It is this: For long we have sought those who have known the Galilean. We want to know him better. And as through a man's friends he may be more fully

appraised, we come to you. You proclaimed his coming, preparing both his way and the hearts of men to receive him. Tell us, then, the story of your days, your doings, and your converse with him."

John was now standing erect. Despite the ravages of his long imprisonment, he presented a picture of superb manhood. He threw back that regal head, crowned with its unshorn locks, and as he spoke his voice was vibrant with courage and conviction.

"It shall be even as you wish," he began. "Know, therefore, that I was born the son of Zacharias, a priest of God Most High. Naturally, all my early life was spent in close association with the Temple. Early I became familiar with its holy ritual and with the teachings of its leaders. For often, gathered in my father's house, in solemn conclave or in friendly talk, were those to whom had been committed the oracles of God.

"But that was not all. Other influences played upon my youthful soul. I was constantly under the direction of my godly parents, nor was I permitted to mingle as freely as I wished with those of my own age. And what struck me as strange indeed was that no shears were ever allowed to touch my head. One day, I inquired the reason for this of my honored father. And then, with solemn air, he told me that I was vowed unto Jehovah's service from my birth.

"There was much more that he also bore in his heart. What it was he declined to say. All my importunities were in vain. He bade me ponder what I had already

heard, and with due submission to his will to study diligently the sacred writings of our prophets."

We interrupted the narrative, great though our eagerness to hear him further: "Was that to trace the promises given to your people that a Messiah should come?"

"Yea, truly," he answered. "And if with patience you will hear me, you shall surely know all.

"I obeyed my father's behests. And the years sped quickly by. Then came a day when he took me aside. The hour for my mission had not yet come, but my father was growing old and stricken with the infirmities common to age. He thought, perchance, that he might be summoned hence before acquainting me with the charge laid upon him.

"I could scarcely believe my ears as he spoke. I, a son of Israel, one among so many, had been chosen by the Almighty to proclaim the coming of the Heavenly Prince.

"I listened to him as one in a trance. It seemed to me the baseless fancies of an aged man. And yet, on seeking out my mother for a denial of the story he had told, I found that she too, with even greater certainty, believed the same thing. It was passing strange. Yea, much as I revered my parents, I feared that their ambitious desire to see me in some place of eminence had given birth to the idea. Long did I turn it over in my mind. And ere I had reached any satisfactory conclusion, the blow fell upon us. My father fell sick.

Few were the days he was granted to remain with us, for many had been his years. And swiftly he passed from our sight.

"If there had been grounds for bitterness in my soul before, they were increased now a thousandfold. It was like this. My father, in the simplicity of his gracious heart, had previously confided something of his hopes for me to certain of his brethren. That was foolish, as you will agree when I tell you my story. They were envious of him. They plainly showed it by their manner toward him. But there were others who openly reviled him, accusing him of weaving this tissue of falsehood merely for self-glorification. All that I knew, for from my mother I had learned of my father's heaviness at the treatment meted out to him. But now, as we gathered to do honor to this devout servant of Jehovah, behold, those same hypocritical perverters of righteousness were there assembled. With fulsome words and nauseous adulation they sought to deck the name of one whom they had maligned. And verily, only with much effort did I repress my anger at their hollow words. Yet hearken to me. One of the chief scribes came unto me that evening, when our home was still shadowed with a sense of loss, and when my mother and I looked with poignant sorrow at the place where my father was wont to sit. And what, think you, did this man purpose? To reprove me for the error my father had carried in his bosom? Yea, in part, but also to condemn me roundly for my abstention from the

synagogue, and for my unveiled contempt for those who were the acknowledged leaders of the people.

" 'Speak not to me of the dead,' I said, 'save in terms of respect. And of the living, not at all. This my mother has suffered many things at the hands of your churlish friends, and neither she nor I will darken the place of your assemblies evermore. Now begone.'

"Grieved was my mother's soul at such an outburst, and she bade the noble teacher to give no heed to my wild speech. But, notwithstanding her entreaties, I was firm in my resolve. And seeing that my stubbornness, as she was pleased to call it, saddened her, I fared forth from the habitations of men. I was weary of those whom I knew best. They had posed as the custodians of virtue, the representatives of the Almighty, and the guides of our race in all that was pure and right. I discerned nothing but what was base, unworthy, yea, even wicked, in all their loud professions, and the stench of their vile schemings and jealousies revolted my very soul."

"Then that was the reason," we ventured, "for your sojourn amid the wastes of Jordan?"

"Yea, verily, that and— But give me time and you shall hear all. There amid the solitudes, where the fare was poor but life so sweet, I had opportunity of communing not only with Nature, in all her varied moods, but also with my own soul. I listened to the music of the world about me. The humming of the insects upon the wing, the songs of birds, the throbbing

harmonies of the winds that rose at nightfall, and the gurgling of the waters as they flowed to the rivers filled my soul with gladness. But in the silence of the midnight hours I heard an inner voice that I could not but heed. It bore witness to the truth of what my father had told me. I saw in a vision, as it were, the coming of Gabriel, the archangel of Jehovah, bidding my parents prepare for the birth of that son who was, in turn, to prepare the way of a greater One, even the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah of our people. I often pondered this in the quiet of my heart. But little did I perceive of its urgency until, as I lay there one night, gazing in rapt wonder upon the glory of the starlit heavens, an impulse came upon me that I could not resist. It seemed as if the voice of God were summoning me to the mission for which I had come into the world.

"Immediately I responded. Without waiting for aught, I set out on my journey toward the plains of Judea. The day broke as I traversed the low-rolling wilds of the plateau, and the glory of the rising sun gave me a good omen of the magnificence of the new era to which the world was being called. Then, with a deep sense of my commission burning in my soul, down there by Jordan's banks I commenced my task as the herald of the Highest. At first, a few curious shepherds and some who were going forth to their day's toil were all who heard me. But the news spread. My message had been thrust upon me from above, and

the burden of it was, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' By evening, the people were thronging from city and village to hear the word of Jehovah. It had not been revealed unto me whence the Deliverer would come, nor in what form he would be made manifest. It was enough for me that I knew—knew with a conviction that I could not express—that God would keep faith with his people, nor would he suffer his servant to be put to shame."

"And the Christ?" we asked. "How were you to recognize him?"

The Baptist looked at us for a moment, as though the question had never presented itself to him before.

"Have you not found, even in your own experience, that one has but to be true to the light already given in order that fuller light may be imparted? It was even so with me. It had been revealed that he upon whom the Spirit of God should appear would be thus marked out as the Messiah. And so, in faith and patience, I waited for the unfolding of the divine will. It was not without stern effort, however, that I thus possessed my soul. For there were those who were sent of the Chief Priests, demanding to know who and what I was. Well do I remember their coming. The eager crowds were gathered about me, listening to the word of the Lord, when these envoys arrived. Unceremoniously, and without a thought as to the effect their insolent behavior might have, they thrust the people aside. One of them raised his hand to silence me.

Then he demanded, in a high-pitched voice, 'Who art thou?'

"It was ludicrous. I knew quite well what the rulers thought. Evidently a garbled story had been carried to them, saying that I, John, the son of one of their own number, was posing as the Messiah. And at first I knew not whether to laugh at the question, showing how foolish were those who had believed such a statement, or to treat it seriously. However, when this man asked me directly if I were the Christ, the matter was settled. I dared not trifle with such an inquiry. At once I firmly replied that I was not. But plainly, neither he nor his companions were satisfied. One question followed another: 'Art thou Elijah?' 'Art thou the prophet?' And again I replied that I was not. Yet their curiosity was strong within them, and the foremost again spoke. 'Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?'

"Then I could contain myself no longer. The Spirit of God moved my heart. The hour was fast approaching, and there was no need for further hesitancy on my part. My mission must be declared. From the depths of memory came the words I had learned from the Scriptures. And I replied, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah.' But that left them still unconvinced. They railed at me. 'Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elijah, neither that prophet?'

"I knew instinctively that I must state clearly what my convictions were, and so I answered, 'I baptize with water; but there standeth One among you, whom ye know not. He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.'

"With these words ringing in their ears, the deputation withdrew. And having completed my work for that day, I went with some of my adherents to the place where I was to lodge for the night. Two of them remained with me. It is meet that I should name them, for, in later days, they became followers of him whose coming I heralded. One was Andrew; the other a son of Zebedee, named John. Both were noble-minded young men who, having heard the tidings I bore, spent all their leisure in my company. And right proudly do I now think of them as those whom it was my privilege to instruct. But I must hasten on. My life in this place is uncertain.

"It was the next day. How the memory of it lingers! We were walking by Jordan's banks, Andrew, John, and I, when I saw Jesus in the distance. Immediately I stopped. I saw the look of wonder in the faces of my two friends, for they knew not why I had thus suddenly halted. They followed the direction of my finger, and to my lips rose the words, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.'

"Naturally, they were mystified. I scarcely knew myself why I had said it, at that moment. Call it intui-

tion if you will. To me it was a direct revelation from Jehovah. I seemed to see in a flash the awesome scene made memorable in our history. It was that night in Egypt when Moses, with our fathers, awaited the deliverance that God should work. The angel of Death was abroad in the land. His flaming sword of retribution swept over palace and hovel, the stately mansion and the homes of the people. But while the first-born was taken from the families of so many, there were others that were left unmolested. I asked myself the reason. Then I recalled that, at God's bidding, a lamb had been slain as a sacrifice in the homes of the believing. The blood had then been sprinkled on the lintels and sideposts of the doors. And, wheresoever that sign appeared, the Destroyer had had mercy, and gone his way.

"My mind had spanned the centuries. I now saw these things glowing with new meaning. The scourge of judgment for wrongdoing none could escape. Life was so constituted. But in the infinite mercy of the Holy One repentance brought forgiveness. Yet it could be only at incalculable cost to the love that would reclaim the sinner. And thus, the incarnate Son of God had assumed our mortal life to show us what God is like and what man should be. He had come to give himself for man's redemption. And as that lamb of the Old Covenant signified deliverance through faith, though only by the sacrifice of its life, so here was

the fulfilment of the ancient figure which, on our Day of Remembrance, had been perpetuated.

"But my words had brought only perplexity to my friends. I felt Andrew's hand on my arm. 'Master,' he said, 'what do you mean? A man of striking presence we see approaching us, but no lamb has he.'

"I could not refrain from smiling at his eagerness to learn the purport of my words. But having pledged both my friends to secrecy for the time being, I intrusted them with the momentous news: 'This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.' "

A light transformed the rugged countenance of the Baptist as he spoke, and we could almost feel the throb of the experience he was living anew. "Truly, it was revealed to you by God himself," we said, "that this was the mighty One for whom the race was waiting."

"Yea," he answered. "But let me proceed. There is much yet to tell. While I was thus speaking with my two companions, Jesus drew near. I knew not how to address him; but he it was who spoke first, requiring baptism at my hands in the waters of Jordan. I looked at him aghast. Then, realizing the position in which I stood, I exclaimed, 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?' There was a look of matchless tenderness and understanding in his face as he listened to my protest. Then with a graciousness the like of

which I had never seen, he said quietly, 'Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.'

"What he meant, I did not stop to think. It was enough that this honor had been conferred upon me by One before whom I ought to have done obeisance. Yet that was ever the way of the Master, as I have since learned. Like to an equal with him did he make all men feel. And thus, without further demur, I took him by the hand, leading him down the crumbling river bank, and into the swift-flowing waters that came from distant Hermon. Then was my heart well-nigh overwhelmed by the splendor of that moment. The heavens opened. I saw the Spirit, in the form of a dove, alight upon him. But what moved me to the depths of my being was the voice I heard, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

"Many a time since then I have asked myself why I should have been privileged thus to minister to the Christ of prophecy. But I know in part why this divine revelation was vouchsafed at that hour. It was borne in upon me that he must increase, while I must decrease. The sun, having reached its zenith, begins to decline. The soaring mountain peak, once scaled, offers no further scope to the climber. Nay, perchance I do not express it clearly, but I knew that my work was completed. Imperfect though my witness had been, faulty though my presentation of the truth committed

to me, I had done my part, and my task as the forerunner was fulfilled.

"It did not surprise me to learn that my two disciples, Andrew and John, had fallen under the spell of the divine Master. Nay, it would have been surprising indeed were such not the case. For as I looked into his eyes, luminous with the light of heaven, and felt the impact of his mighty heart upon my life, I knew that to serve him, to be allowed to hear his words and share his travail, were the highest blessing that could befall humankind. And so, when I beheld them following him after he had made that open acknowledgment of his subservience to the Almighty, I rejoiced in the possession they had found.

"I felt somewhat saddened to think that my own work was over. Possibly it was because, had it still remained to me, I would have tried to do it better. But then, as you well know, looking back one is often full of regrets, unavailing though they are. And yet, I had striven to be faithful. Because of that I am here, a prisoner in the dungeon of Herod. May I tell you why? But, I must hasten ere the guards return.

"Well, while I was speaking to the people of the righteous anger of God against sin, and denouncing the evils that I saw about me in the cities, there were some who tried to discredit me, publicly calling my sincerity into question. One of them, taunting me, half in playfulness, said, ' 'Tis indeed brave to rail at the wrongs of the common folk, but why do you not rebuke those

in high places?' I turned upon him, bidding him speak his mind plainly.

"He was referring to Herod the Tetrarch who had become ruler of Judea. This son of Herod the great was a poor successor of his father, lacking both those qualities of mind and heart that a ruler ought to possess. Notwithstanding the need, therefore, of giving all his attention to the province over which he exercised authority, he wasted his strength in petty disputes with his brother, Archelaus, regarding the title of king. That was in part due to the fact, as you may remember, that his father had left three separate wills, dividing his kingdom between his sons. However, I need not weary you with that. Suffice it to say, the Tetrarch went to Rome to confer with the Emperor Augustus, and get his ruling on the matter. While there, he sought out his brother, Philip, in the hope that he would support his case before the emperor. Herod then began a shameful intrigue with Herodias, his brother's wife. And she, lost to all sense of decency and right, forsook her husband, and with her daughter, Salome, finally accompanied the Tetrarch back to Galilee.

"It was this that my critic had in mind. 'Afraid to tell Herod of his wrongdoing?' I challenged. 'Let me but be given audience with him, and I will tell him to his sensual face that such iniquities shall not go unpunished.'

"Looking back, that may have sounded more harsh than was warranted, for the man was justified in de-

testing Herod's evil ways. It had been noised abroad throughout the land. And the shame of it was the more felt by our people because Herod was a professed follower of the traditions of our fathers. And a Hebrew should be beyond reproach. I knew not, however, how I could gain admission to the palace. But the unexpected happened. A messenger from the royal house came to me, demanding that I should present myself to the king. He had heard of the work I had been doing, and thought, perhaps, that I was like the wonder-workers who sometimes imposed on the credulity of the populace. Thus the opportunity I sought came to me.

"I was ushered into the royal presence. There sat Herod in all the magnificence he loved to indulge. And I could scarcely restrain my wrath, for there, seated by his side, and turning their languishing eyes upon him, were Herodias, the infamous, and her daughter, Salome.

" 'You are a son of our race, Baptist, and your fame as an orator of note has been told to me,' Herod said condescendingly. 'Speak to us some stirring passage from the story of our nation, that my noble wife may be the better informed of the exploits that have made our people great. Then, later, you will also show us your marvels.'

"I looked at him, my blood now boiling with righteous anger. And seeing that he had settled himself expectantly, awaiting the thing he had commanded, I

began to speak. But it was other than he anticipated. I told of the glorious courage and fidelity of Abraham, our father, and of the mighty Moses who led the people forth from abject slavery to sovereignty. Then my indignation burst all bounds. Rebuking the infamous conduct of which he was guilty, I showed the reproach which his misdeeds had brought upon the name of Hebrew. And even as I spoke, I saw his color change. He became deathly pale. His trembling hands clutched the arms of his regal chair, and his head sank upon his breast. But ere I had concluded what was upon my conscience to say, Herodias sprang to her feet. She commanded me to be silent. And as I heeded her not, she called to the men who were Herod's bodyguards, and bade them fling me into prison.

"It was not more than I had foreseen as possible. But to my astonishment, soon after I had been thrust into this place, the door was opened, and Salome, attired in a wondrous garment of shimmering silk, stood before me. She laid her hand upon my head, caressingly, until I thrust it aside. Yet not to be outdone, she then poured words of honeyed endearment into my ears. If only I would assure her of my love, then she would intercede with Herod, and I would be instantly liberated.

"She knew not the man with whom she had to deal. I, who had been dedicated to the service of Jehovah from my birth, what had I to offer her? I spurned her,

like the viper a man would grind under his heel. I bade her begone and never show her painted face again or, with these hands, I would crush the evil life out of her. Since then, my sufferings have been bitter. The torments of the soldiery are meant to break my spirit, and so lead me captive to the feet of this scheming girl.

"Through two of my friends, who were acquainted with the guards, and who gained admittance here after nightfall, I sent word to Jesus, the Master. I bade him hasten to my succor, or at least to reassure me that all was well with him, so that my hopes should not be in vain. For sadly I now acknowledge my fault. I had begun to doubt. When I told my friends to ask, 'Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? it was because I felt that, were he indeed the Christ, he would not have suffered me to languish thus in prison."

"But you blame yourself needlessly," we said. "Surely, the Master would have come to your aid if he had known of your plight."

"Nay, not necessarily. Sometimes we ask for those things which we deem blessings, but which the great Father withholds only that some richer gift may be bestowed. I realized that as my friends returned, for this was the word they brought from the Master whom I revered. 'Tell John,' said he, 'those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the

dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.'

"Surely that were enough to confirm the faith of the most wavering, for such signs and wonders belong wholly to the divine One, the Christ of God. Nor was that all. For but three days ago, another brought me a word that would cheer the soul of any man. You will not think me vain if I impart to you Christ's testimony to my work? Well, after my messengers had returned to me, Jesus said to his disciples, 'What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.'

"Why do I tell you this? Because I know assuredly that there is but one way of deliverance from this prison cell. That is through the gateway of martyrdom. I realize that to the full. Yet I am wondrously content. It is even as though, now that my part were ended, I must needs make my exit from the stage on which, for a brief time, I was the central figure, that the glorious epic of redemption may be worked out to its conclusion. What could man desire more than that? To do one's best, to be true to the promptings of God, to be obedient to the light that is given, and then to leave the results

to the overruling mercy of the great Master of men—that is life's sublimest consummation.

"Hark! here comes the guard! And now, farewell!"

We left the gloomy shades of the prison behind us, but somehow the dark way was illumined with a supernal light. It was the radiant faith of this noble and unconquered soul. Life had dealt hardly with him. He had suffered because of his loyalty. He would yet pay the supreme price for his valiant witness. But lingering in our ear were the words of Christ himself, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." For verily, the faithful soul that stands stanchly for God and right, none can surpass.

## II

## THE STORY OF MARY MAGDALENE

THROUGH the narrow streets of Jerusalem, past the Via Dolorosa, and then into a short byway, over which the houses hung perilously out of the straight, we followed our guide. Bar-Esdras had been more than kind. Baffled by a maze of directions, we had lost our way entirely until he volunteered to lead us to the humble dwelling we sought. We assuredly would never have found it unaided. Three small children were playing happily about the door before which we stopped. From within came the plaintive moaning of some poor creature in pain.

"What does this mean?" we inquired. "Is this the home of Mary, the Magdalene? Is it she who is sick?"

Like one with some deep secret to impart, Bar-Esdras put his finger to his lips. "No, it is not she whom you hear. I should have told you. Mary must perforce seek out some unfortunate creatures who are ill or in trouble, and then she brings them to her abode. Thus may she minister to them with her own hands. That is her way of showing her love for the Lord and her desire to be worthy of the confidence he placed in her. Even these children at the door witness to the same thing. They are orphans—foundlings—whom

she has taken to be with her, that she may rear them for goodness and God. But wait! Here she comes. You shall speak with her yourself. Verily, her story is wondrous indeed."

With a graceful gesture, Mary invited us to enter. We were at once favorably impressed. She had a lovely face. In her youth, at least, she must have been beautiful. Now there were lines about the mouth and eyes betokening suffering. Yet there was also a winsomeness in her smile, a radiant look upon her face, which revealed an inner light like that of the seven-branched candlestick, burning within the Temple. Her bearing was queenly, despite the simplicity of her attire, while her voice was low and sweet.

"The tale of my days?" she queried, as she sat down opposite us. "Ah, no! That were too tragic, almost too sacred for other ears."

"But think of the hope it might bring to others," we persisted. "Think of the hearts bowed with the weight of evil to whom it might be even as the opening of a prison door, or as gladdening as the morning sun piercing the armor of night with its long lances."

"Then that is sufficient. If that be the reason for your plea, then I must yield. I was brought up in Magdala. It was a city populous and busy, but wealthy and wicked. There merchants from afar did ofttimes tarry on their journeyings, and gaiety reigned. My parents were just and upright. They were strict in their observance of the requirements of our faith, and

their one desire was that I, too, should grow up in the fear of God. Alas! I was wise beyond my years. At least, so I persuaded myself. The path of righteousness seemed steep and uninviting. That of mirth and pleasure was alluring because of the freedom it seemed to proffer. Moreover—forgive me if it sounds vain and foolish—I was fair of face, and pleasing of figure.

"It was a certain Phoenician who first told me that. He held, as it were, a mirror before my eyes. I saw myself for the first time as others saw me. And while I turned a deaf ear to his pleadings, while I shrank at first from his words with loathing and contempt, something of what he had said lingered in my mind. I could not put it from me. It echoed in my ears as I went about the customary, yet distasteful, duties of the home. It mocked me in the dark hours of the night.

" 'You are wasted here,' said a voice within. 'What does life hold for you but to become the wife of one of these slow-witted, dull fellows of the town? You were never meant to spend your days so. Loveliness such as you possess can never find its true valuation among those with whom you have lived from childhood. Why not seek the delights and happiness that might be yours for the asking?'

"Oh, why did I listen? I have asked myself that a thousand times since then."

A look of unutterable sadness overspread her face. Her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

"Pray, forgive us if we have asked too much of you—if these memories are too painful to recall," we said. "We will, with your permission, take our leave."

"Nay, do not go," she answered. "I am thinking of what you said about your purpose in coming. Out of bruisèd spices comes forth sweetness. What matters, then, a moment's pain if another heart may be blessed? Let me proceed."

Striving to recover her composure, she went on. "I went to Capernaum. I knew two girls, somewhat older than myself, who had found the confines of Magdala too small for their dreams of indolence and pleasure. They had made their home there. So I sought them out. I found them in affluence. Their abode was more wonderful than I could have imagined. The gems they wore, the costly raiment they flaunted before me, dazzled me. The tale of their conquests went to my head like new wine. If they who were neither as attractive nor gifted as I could secure these things, why should I resign myself to a life of ignominious drudgery and toil? And momentous though the decision, it was made in an instant.

"I beg you, do not misjudge me. Do not think that I am boasting of my wrongdoing, or glorying in my depravity. You must know the depths to which I sank, and the morass of misery into which I fell, if

you would appraise rightly the grace which later raised me from the mire."

"Truly," we replied. "We know full well the motive that impels you to lay bare your soul. We understand."

"That is even as one could wish," she said. "But I must pass over those early days. I came to the notice of one whose wealth and position were the envy of many. His name was Simon. He had a reputation for piety and good deeds which placed him in the forefront of his associates. Yet his heart was as black as his character was a pretense. He flattered me with honeyed words. He spake of my beauty and the joys that might be mine. And although he was careful to screen his real life from the critical eyes of the crowd, and freely cautioned me not to betray his secret, before long his companionship with me became common talk. Though strict in all outward forms and observances, and scrupulous to obey the dictates of the Mosaic Law, men knew him for what he was. That is why they nicknamed him 'Simon, the Pharisee.'

"His ardor cooled under the winds of criticism. A few months later he cast me off and angrily bade me never to come near him again. Threats of violence overcame any stubbornness I first displayed. And from that hour—to my sorrow I recall it—I sank lower and lower. I had long been living on the brink of an abyss. Simon's uncaring hand, now that he was tired of me, thrust me into the depths.

"I need not relate what followed, nor the appalling wickedness of those months. Those nights of folly were meant to blot out every thought of what I might have been, or of what I had forfeited. But they were succeeded by days of remorse in which shame, and a passionate desire to avenge myself on one who still enjoyed some measure of respect, preyed upon me like relentless fiends. I was crazed with hatred, alternating between grief and despair.

"Time passed. Talking with a girl of my own kind in the miserable hovel we shared in Capernaum, she told me some startling news. A noble Teacher, whom many said had come from God, had arrived in the city. His name was Jesus. I had heard of him before. It was rumored that he possessed powers never before wielded by mortal man, and that his words thrilled the souls of those who gathered about him. But it was not of that that Hagar spoke. It was this: Simon, the loathsome, had had the effrontery to invite the Galilean to partake of the evening meal with him. Was it to buttress his crumbling reputation? Was it to secure the favor of this holy Teacher? Was it to confound those who had openly reviled him as a hypocrite that he should pose as a sincere seeker after truth?

"These questions beat insistently in my brain. But I brushed them aside. There was another matter far more important at that moment, although I shudder now at the recollection of it. The very chance for which I had longed, but which had seemed to be beyond

reach, was at hand. I could avenge my wrongs. At one fell swoop I could bring down this man to the dust of humiliation. I would go to his house, timing my arrival so that the Galilean would be there. Then I would denounce Simon for the scoundrel he actually was! And the Master would know why this man was called Simon, the *Pharisee!* Simon, the libertine, the betrayer of innocence, the destroyer of human souls, would stand forth stripped of his supposed rectitude. He who had thrown the filth of his beastliness over more lives than mine would be shown in his true colors.

"It was wicked of me, grossly wicked, as I know now. Yet you must not judge me too harshly. My heart had not known mercy then; it could show none. It was bitter with a sense of injustice. Moreover, there was wounded pride in that my place had been taken by another.

"With eager feet I made my way to Simon's house. My heart turned sick as I passed through the gate and crossed the courtyard where we had so often walked together. I seemed to hear again his dulcet, ingratiating tones, as he expatiated on my loveliness, or poured forth his words of lustful passion. Then a sudden revulsion filled me. I detested and loathed him. I would be avenged if it was the last thing I did in this world! Simon would discover that no furies of the demons themselves could compare with the wrath of a woman scorned!

"Such was the madness that had descended upon me as I stole noiselessly across the marble pavement of the hall, past the plashing fountain, and into the room where the guests reclined at supper. Some of the older serving maids recognized me. I knew they would. But a look from me silenced any protests. Besides, as you know, the customs of our people permitted any from without to enter the chamber where men sat at meat. There was Jesus! No halo adorned his brow, but the radiance of his smile, the animation of his countenance as he spoke of divine things, seemed to belong to another sphere. And opposite, the low table laden with food between, lay Simon, the reprobate!

"As I paused behind Jesus, he seemed unaware of my presence. Not so with Simon. I saw a flush suffuse his face. His dark eyes flashed with a sudden flame as the brows contracted. The hand, outstretched at that instant to take a morsel from the dish before him, trembled so that the food slipped from his fingers. And I smiled maliciously at his discomfiture. He could scarcely order the servants to eject me; he was too cowardly. Probably his one thought was that I had come merely to invoke his aid or to secure some bestowal of alms. He was crafty enough to know that I could speak of that which he would fain keep concealed.

"I stood, awaiting my chance. It would have defeated my object to have broken in abruptly on the conversation. Even had I wished to do so, I could

not! Explain it as you will, there was something about Jesus that held my soul in thrall. I had never seen him before. But the air of quiet authority that invested him, the music of his voice, no less than the sublime words of heavenly lore falling from his lips, held me spellbound. Then, in response to a casual question that, Simon put to him, Jesus went on to speak of the tragic misery of some he had beheld, of lives wasted and gifts misused. And as he did so, again it was as though a mirror were held up to my soul. I saw myself, as it were, through his eyes. All I might have been, all I was, stood out in frightful contrast! Who was I to pronounce judgment upon another? Simon might be guilty, but was I guiltless? No words I could utter against him could be as bitter as those an outraged conscience used as a lash upon my spirit.

"All thoughts of hatred and malice were forgotten. In spite of myself, I listened. And as I did so, something broke down the barriers of reserve. Crouching behind those sacred feet, like a wounded animal seeking cover, my tears began to flow. Verily, I who had not wept for years, except in vexation, was melted like the snows of Lebanon beneath the warm rays of the sun. And then, in anguish, I noticed with dismay, yea, almost fear, that my tears had fallen upon his feet. I did not know what to do. I was beside myself with mortification. Would he turn the tables on me by rebuking me for the defilement I had unwittingly

flung upon him? Terrified, I tried to wipe those tears away with my untressed hair, the badge of my degradation. Accidentally, my fingers touched his feet. A wave of emotion to which I had long been stranger flooded my being. All restraints were cast aside. I could not help myself. I must make amends for the wrong I had done him. I took a cruse of spikenard from the folds of my robe. I poured it upon his feet. I did more: I kissed them again and again! Knowing that I had incurred his displeasure, knowing that it could be only a moment before rough hands would seize me at Simon's command and fling me out into the darkness of the night, still I cared not what might happen. Like flame answering to flame, my soul had gone out to him. I had touched One whose very person seemed to impart cleansing, to rekindle hope, to renew virtue. Life had come!

"My brain was in a whirl. Then I became aware that Simon's indignant gaze was fastened upon me. I knew, instinctively, what he was saying to himself. If the Master had been what he professed to be, he would never have allowed me to touch him; or, having touched him, he would have turned upon me with scathing rebuke. Was it that Simon suspected he had found another of false pretensions and hypocritical life like himself? The question remained unanswered.

"Jesus, first looking at me, addressed his host. 'Simon,' he said, and I caught a glint of momentary anger in his eyes. 'I have somewhat to say unto thee.'

"With a shrug of his shoulders, the other replied, 'Master, say on.'

"Then Jesus began to tell one of those stories which had made him famous. They were so simple that a child could understand them. So profound were they that even when one felt he had grasped their meaning, one discovered depths that had not been sounded. This was what he said, as far as I can recall it. There was a man who, in going over his affairs, found that he had, among others, two debtors. He summoned them both, in the hope of receiving a settlement. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. He spoke frankly to them, and learned that times had been hard and money was scarce. They were honest men, and had done their best. Circumstances had, however, been against them. Their indebtedness to the merchant hung about their necks like millstones. Seeing how matters stood, this generous-hearted man took his pen, and at a stroke canceled both debts.

"It sounded so improbable to a man of Simon's disposition that I noticed he looked but mildly interested. But the Master fixed his eyes upon him, and said, 'Tell me, which of them will love him the more?'

"With a bored air, Simon observed, rather carelessly, 'I suppose he to whom he forgave most.'

"That was precisely the answer Jesus expected. He said pointedly, 'Thou hast rightly judged.' Then fixing a stern look on Simon, he went on: 'Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house; thou gavest me

no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.' And he said unto me, 'Thy sins are forgiven.'

"You doubtless know what followed. From that hour everything was changed. All enmity was taken from my soul. Moreover, the way to the old life had been barred. Nay; it was as though, reversing the case of our first parents, an angel with a flaming sword stood to keep me within my new-found Eden. As you will understand, I dared not accompany the Master from place to place. I knew the vindictiveness of Simon. He was second only to myself in his capacity for hatred! He would have leaped at the chance of maligning him who had taken the part of the sinner against the sanctimonious. Injured pride and foolish vanity would have moved him to do anything. A scurrilous report of the Saviour's interest in me would have been comparatively harmless. It was the hint, the innuendo, even the things left unsaid, which I feared most of all. So, though my gratitude was unbounded, though I would have counted it a priceless privilege to have done anything to further his efforts,

that was denied me. This, however, was within my power. I found that Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, and other women who had received grace at his hand, were ministering to the disciples of their substance. And in this they graciously gave me a part.

"Jesus spoke truly when he said that those who had been forgiven much must love much. He had lifted me from the depths of misery. Nay; he had saved me from the lowest hell into which any woman can fall. Did you wonder at my sense of indebtedness? The most I could do, the utmost devotion I could show, the fullest obedience, the lavishment of love, mute though it must be, were but a pitiful drop compared with the ocean itself.

"What befell him on that darkest and most disastrous of days at Calvary you recall. Some have given me unmerited praise because I lingered by the Cross, with his mother, until the last agonized breath had been drawn. There was nothing in that worthy of commendation. Why should I not stay there? I had nothing to lose. I had lost everything, as I viewed matters, when with foul hands they nailed him to that tree.

"The third day, some of us went to our Lord's tomb. There was little we could do, but that little could not be withheld. With the spices that our honored friend, Nicodemus, had provided, we intended to embalm the body of him we loved. Our consternation on finding the tomb empty you can perhaps imagine. My soul

was in revolt! It seemed as though all the powers of darkness had conspired against the noblest, fairest soul that ever walked God's earth. For myself, I was almost demented. The thwarted purpose, the tumultuous waves of emotion dammed up in my heart, well-nigh drove me to desperation. Listening to the excited questions of my friends, I had no explanation to offer. I hastened to tell Peter and the rest what had happened. They left immediately for the Garden, and then I retraced my steps as quickly as I could.

"Day was breaking as I got back. I caught sight of a figure not far from the sepulcher, and, thinking that it was one of Joseph's men, I went to him. I inquired where the body of our Lord had been laid. Possibly fearing there had been some mistake in using the tomb belonging to Joseph, he had borne the precious remains to some other spot.

"The inquiry had barely left my lips when I knew that this was no man belonging to the estate. The light was still imperfect and my eyes were dim with weeping or I should have recognized Jesus at once. But when he said, 'Mary,' in those well-remembered tones, then every doubt vanished. Falling at his feet, my eyes welling with tears of joy and my heart throbbing with exultation, all I could say was 'Rabboni—my Master.' I knew the blessed Saviour lived!

"Although it might seem beyond belief, as I told myself again and again, yet I was certain. The poor mangled form which I had seen with my own eyes

laid in that tomb was transfigured. It was instinct with life. That face, glowing with heavenly light, was the face, not of a victim, but of a victor.

"And to many others the living Lord was made manifest. Yet from that day, even though later he was taken from our sight, my faith has never faltered. Not only was he the Lord of my life, but also sovereign over the powers of darkness and of death. The vision of the risen Redeemer could never fade. But neither could the words my parents had taught me long before pass from my heart. 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

"He, the incarnate Son of God, had come to such as I to reveal the love of the compassionate Father for all mankind. Even though he might be pitiless regarding their sins, he was pitiful indeed toward the sinner. He came not to blame, but to bless; not to rebuke, but to redeem; not to sear the soul with scorching condemnation, but to save it from itself—to bring it to purity and peace, happiness and harmony with the divine will. For myself, I cannot conceive how any can hear his voice without a ready response, or read the records of his patience, his sufferings, and his glorious sacrifice for sinners without yielding their hearts to his sovereign rule. Could my poor testimony carry weight or my voice carry conviction, I would assure all men that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour

of the world. And in his service have I found what for long I sought in vain. It is what men still seek: the joy of living, and the power of love to inspire the soul to noble endeavor center in the Son of God, which is Christ Jesus, our Lord."

## III

## THE STORY OF THE YOUNG RULER

YOU could not have helped yourself. Had you met him that day in Jerusalem, you would almost certainly have looked at him twice. He was such a tall, commanding figure. Admittedly, his appearance was as unusual as it was striking. His long robes of pure white linen were surmounted by a cloak, expensive in material and cut, and ornate with embroidery and gems. His turban was set off with a gleaming jewel. A heavy gold chain of costly workmanship adorned his neck, while on his hands were rings incrusted with rare stones. A man like that was bound to attract one's attention. And yet it was not so much his dress as his face that gripped the soul. It was a sad face. There were deep lines about the mouth, denoting one who had passed through some bitter experience. The shadows beneath his eyes gave added gravity to his countenance. And yet, in spite of that, there was a look of compassion upon it. A fleeting smile played about the mouth as though a continual effort were being made to overcome a natural melancholy and to compensate with some passing kindness for previous omissions.

That was the impression he made upon us as he

stood against the imposing background of his sumptuous home.

"My story?" he queried. "Can it be that any are concerned with that? Had I been the happy possessor of heroic qualities, or were there any deed of outstanding merit to which I could lay claim, I could understand your request. But as I look back I see that my life might be summed up in a single phrase."

He stopped for a moment, lost in thought. It was as if he were surveying from some high point of vantage the path by which he had come.

"And what might that phrase be?" we inquired.

His eyes were strangely bright, and yet misted over with regret.

"Within the compass of four words the story of my life could be told—'It might have been.' Yet, if it be your wish, I will speak freely of the past. One thing, however, I must set in the forefront. Many have stumbled at what the Master commanded me. Few have grasped the inner meaning of his words. Indeed, from what I have gathered, men have been held back from the high call of discipleship due to that mistake. They have construed a particular command into a general principle. Foolishly, in my judgment, they have regarded it as a prime necessity to abandon all earthly possessions. They have thought that Jesus flung prosperity into the category of things evil, exalting poverty as the chief virtue. He did nothing of the kind. If I may so put it to you without offense,

he was too practical, too sane, too wise. It is true that the narrow gate of penury was pointed out to me. But there was a reason for that. He discerned that which I had never seen until that hour.

"Though I had prided myself upon my allegiance to Jehovah and the faith of my fathers, I was an idolater. I was a bondslave, pitiable, yea, despicable, although I boasted that I was freeborn. In spite of all my possessions, I was but poor, and blind, and naked. And my attainments, my supposed piety, my oft-affirmed devotion to goodness, were as dross compared with gold, a mere substitute for reality, when the divine tests were applied thereto. But I am anticipating what you are waiting to hear.

"That I should be criticized for my refusal of Christ's call is only to be expected. But I see now that he was right and I was wrong. Perhaps I was vain. Now that I have reached maturity, I see that vanity and virtuousness were strangely mixed in me. I belonged to one of the best families of Jerusalem, as we measured those things. My father was among the wealthiest merchants of the city. His caravans were found on every trade route from Damascus to Egypt. But he had other plans for me and, truth to tell, I was but little inclined toward the harassing life of business. So I became a student of the Law. What gifts I had —and they were rated by my friends as of no mean order—were recognized by the Sanhedrin. When my father died, I was only twenty-three. But he had the

satisfaction, before his eyes were veiled by the shadows, of seeing me called to the exalted seats of the rulers. Yet I owed that honor to him who had been so careful of my upbringing and the wealth he had labored so long and arduously to make mine.

"Pleasant were those days. I was accorded the esteem of my equals and the respect of the populace. My life was peaceful; nothing disturbed its serenity. I had no enemies without, no specters born of a riotous youth to disturb me within. Blameless, respected, and rich in worldly goods, not to say self-righteous, am I not correct in describing those days as serene? Then, like a stone flung into a placid lake, reflecting the quiet hills and the blue of our Syrian sky, the mirror of my life was shattered. There came to Jerusalem that divine revealer, the Galilean. I had heard of his fame as a new teacher and the reputed worker of many marvels. But I must see and hear him for myself.

"I went forth both curious and critical, with some feeling of mild contempt for one without the authority of the Sanhedrin as a teacher of spiritual things. Yet as I stood there, on the fringe of the crowd, carefully hidden from men's gaze, but where I could observe everything, I confess my soul was enthralled. If ever a man were illumined by the light of heavenly wisdom, if ever a man spoke with clarity and conviction, if ever a man pierced the tinsel and trappings of the rich and the rough homespun of the poor, it was Jesus of Nazareth that day. As he taught, his words like winged

arrows infixed my heart. I felt that I could not stay; and yet I knew full well that I could not depart. I, who had been so self-complacent, so superior to the lower orders, so sure of myself and of the rewards I merited, found myself like a man who had suddenly lost his foothold on the solid rock, and had been plunged into icy waters which threatened to engulf him. I was more than distressed. I was staggered by the revelation of a need which I had never suspected before.

"I tarried until the people had dispersed and the Master was alone. I implored him to tell me the way to eternal life. It was the frenzied act of a drowning man who had found a spar on which to lay hold. But while the Master's reception of me was cordial and sympathetic to a degree, I was rather disappointed by his answer. When he bade me keep the commandments, believe me, it was not vain boasting on my part when I said, 'All these things have I kept from my youth up.' I meant it. As far as my light went, it was true. By the standards of my day I had, as I have pointed out, lived an irreproachable life.

"No profligate was I. The gentle love of my mother had early created in me a reverence for things pure and right. Moreover, my father's sage counsel and his personal integrity, no less than the teaching of the rabbis, had inculcated a spirit of obedience to the Law. No other gods had a place in my soul; nor had I made for myself any graven image. Jehovah reigned su-

preme. Never had I taken his name in vain, nor forgotten the sanctity of the Sabbath. To honor my father and mother was no task; nor was it hard to refrain from killing and adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, or coveting. Thus confidently did I meet the challenge of the Master's words.

"Yet, as I was compelled to confess to him, I was conscious of a distinct lack—something indefinable, and yet real enough. Although I could not say what it was, he knew. Those clear eyes penetrated the depths of my soul. They saw something there concerning the existence of which I was ignorant. In the inner shrine stood an idol—the idol of self. I had thought myself moved by only the highest motives in my regard for the Law and my obedience to the traditions of the elders. But, like one climbing the mountains of Lebanon, I had reached only a spur that I had mistaken for the summit. And now, under his guidance, I saw peak after peak soaring high above me, touching the sapphire skies themselves. All my ritual observances, I repeat, were dwarfed into insignificance. I knew, then, that I had been living not for God, but for the approval of man, and ministering thus to my self-esteem and vanity.

"As my eyes looked into his pure face, I noted a look of noble hope for me. And still his words were like a spear piercing the armor of pride and reaching my heart. 'If thou wilt be perfect,' he said, 'go and sell

that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.'

"Did Jesus fully comprehend what he asked of me? Did I? I thought I did. I saw, melting before my eyes, like winter snows beneath the warmth of the spring sunshine, everything that I held dear. This house, with its appointments, its tapestries and silver; the courtyard where I loved to walk, listening to the tinkling waters of the fountain, and watching the ravishing splendor of the peacocks as they strutted to and fro; my servants who moved swiftly and obsequiously to do my lightest bidding—these vanished like a mirage even while I mused.

"The jewel of divine companionship that he offered, of course, awakened desire. I recall a kindred experience. El-Nathan, known far and wide as a judge of rare gems, once sought me out. He had returned after a long sojourn in Egypt. And while there, he had acquired some pearls that Cleopatra herself might well have treasured. In fact, so said the wily merchant, the chief of these had once graced her fair person. Of the truth of that I cannot speak, but this I know: my soul was inflamed with longing. But the sum he asked for them, I dared not even consider. Yet, how I thought of them! How they glowed with soft iridescence—some white as Tabor's snows, some pink like unto a babe's rounded cheek. Yet, despite my riches, my ardent wish to make them mine, I could not wisely buy. So also was it with that costly gem which Christ

proffered. I felt the price was beyond me. And I was sorrowful. But I realize now that he was more sorrowful still.

"One understands many things as one grows older. Sometimes, alas! it is only when it is too late. As I think over the events of those days, I see clearly that the Master was speaking of things that I then but dimly discerned. While I gloried in my freedom from the limitations of the common lot, I was yet fettered like a slave. While I imagined myself actuated by the highest motives, I had none higher than pride in the approval of my fellow-men. While I declined his call, thinking that by refusing poverty I should retain wealth, I am convinced that I had forfeited a treasure of incalculable worth and barred for myself the one path that might have led my feet to life's greatest attainments.

"I now understand why he urged self-sacrifice. It was something more than that which he had in view—a greater blessing. Alas! I could see nothing beyond the costliness of it. Trained as Jesus had been in the school of stern experience, he knew that a life which had never needed effort, to which all things had come easily, must lack much, notwithstanding its abundance. Sacrifice, in my case, was intended to be as when the athlete lays aside his encumbering robes that he may run the race. Or, perchance, it were a closer parallel to say, the Master bade me discard useless burdens which would impede my progress as he bade me face

the precipitous slopes of duty. By that steep track, what otherwise might not be won should be mine—namely, that development which comes through discipline, and a full-orbed manhood, arrayed in the majesty that only conquest can yield.

"You ask why I did not afterward return to my quest and seek again the noble way of self-sacrifice and service by his side? My answer is this. Perfect as I regarded myself, superior as I felt I was even to the Galilean and his friends, vanity made that course impracticable until—until it was too late. My position in the Sanhedrin kept me well informed regarding the trend of events. I knew—and none better—how unpopular Jesus had become. I heard the violent words that passed amongst the elders as his outspokenness and his unmeasured scorn for their evil ways were discussed. I listened, horrified and yet helpless, as they took counsel how they might overthrow him. If my motives will not be misunderstood, if it will not be thought that I am trying to excuse my base neglect of One so exalted, I may admit that I did try to use my wealth on the Master's behalf. When, on one occasion, they sent Rufus, an officer of the guard, to arrest him, it was I who arranged with the soldiers that they should come back empty-handed. When the council debated their action concerning Jesus, it was by the judicious bestowal of gifts that some of my friends supported the plea of the revered Nicodemus for justice. If only I had known in time of that nefarious plot of Judas, I

would cheerfully, yea gladly, have paid him any price to have secured his silence.

"But even up to that time, childish though it must appear in the telling, both futile and foolish as were the attempts I made, I still thought myself sufficient unto the hour. Often had I heard that opportunities ill-used or scorned were sensitive. They turn aside from him who embraces them not. They vanish, never to return. But did I give heed to such counsel? Nay; I was too sure that I was equal to anything that might arise. It was more hazardous than wisdom would sanction, but I was ultimately goaded to action by a conscience that would not be denied. When I learned that the Roman power was to be invoked to do what its law for us forbade, I sent Eliphaz, the chief of my household, with a gift unto Pontius Pilate. The course of justice had been diverted before in a less worthy cause by means of lavish bribes. This all men knew. And my faith in my gold was still so great that I was well assured that Pilate would give heed unto its plea for a favorable dismissal of the case.

"The hapless Eliphaz, to whom I had given careful instructions lest his mission should be suspected, fell in with certain of the High Priest's henchmen. The trial of Jesus was in progress before he could conveniently leave them. And vainly, thereafter, did he seek private audience with the Procurator. Only after the sentence of death was pronounced, and Jesus given

over to be scourged, did he return to me. Thus my plan miscarried.

"Bear with me while I speak further of my foolishness. It is, as you will perceive, far from easy to lay bare the story of my poor vacillation and its dire results. And yet it does afford a certain relief to my soul thus to speak into a sympathetic ear.

"Not to be daunted by my fruitless efforts—for I was almost desperate—I summoned certain of my slaves. Most of them had been born in my own house, and at my bidding they would face any danger for my sake. This was what I purposed. You will see now what I meant by describing my endeavors as both futile and foolish. I conceived the idea of breaking through the guard as they led the Master to Golgotha. Of course, it had not occurred to me that Pilate would consider him of enough importance to send more than a quaternion of his soldiers to carry out the law. But I was wrong. Two malefactors, both desperate criminals, were to be executed at the same time. And to avoid any attempt at rescue by the robber bands—perhaps also to hold Caiaphas and his cruel followers in check—a body of armed men compassed the prisoners around.

"But it was not to be. I saw that Divine Master hounded to his death. I was still either too vain or cowardly—call it what you will—further to take his part. I thought that eventually I might have the privilege of giving him decent burial. Filled with that hope,

I went myself to the praetorium to ask Pilate's permission, only to find that I had been forestalled. The gracious Joseph had claimed the body, and again I had failed."

The ruler paused. His narration had moved him deeply. But we took that moment to put a question to him.

"Great must be the heart's pain at such poignant memories, and full the repentance called forth by this tragic course of events. Yet we are emboldened to ask, why do you still wear the raiment of the ruler? And why this abode of elegance and wealth? If no malice be imputed to us nor idle curiosity, we would like to know the reason."

"Verily, you have asked that which may well give rise to questions in your mind. I understand, and will explain all. My position is still highly esteemed by me because, by word and influence, I may yet help to guide the destinies of my people aright. None can take from me the place of the ruler, though all know now that, in my soul, I have espoused the Galilean and his cause. My home I am forbidden to relinquish. It is held in solemn trust for those who come after me, even as my beloved father did direct. But this, though it may sound but a vain boast, may I say. This house is known as one the doors of which stand open to the needy. My resources—may I thus confide in you?—are also dedicated to the service of succoring the afflicted. And while, I trust, my heart has been delivered

from its bonds, my soul cleansed of its idolatry, I find here the daily reminder of what might have been.

"This is the truth which my life proclaims to all mankind: Follow the light, obey the voice divine, and yield to the impulse from above. Why? Because the opportunity of finding the riches of Christ's companionship may not return, and the mists of night full soon enshroud the path. Thus you can see that mine is indeed the tragedy of the unattained. Like one dying in his youth, all my hopes, my highest desires, and worthiest aspirings remained unfulfilled. All my life is one great regret for the good I might have done and the prize I forfeited."

He broke off abruptly. Then with trembling fingers he took the turban from his head. He removed the heavy golden chain, and stripped off the richly wrought robe from his shoulders.

"What does this mean?" we inquired.

"You do well to ask," he replied. "I have been speaking to you of the noblest Master who ever called man to know him. My folly has persisted up to this moment. Yet while I have been conversing with you, living over the stirring happenings of those days that once were, I have felt anew the thrill of a great challenge. I have heard again the accents of that divine voice. This very hour I will turn aside from the path I have pursued. How can you believe, otherwise, in my sincerity or my penitence? I will go to his apostles. I will openly ally myself as a devout and humble believer in his

sovereign grace. But heed this word of counsel. Jesus, the divine Redeemer, may not bid you to sell what you have. Your idol or weakness may not be as mine was. Yet he calls you, even as again he has called me, to the high and sacred path of companionship with him, to the privilege of sharing his efforts to bless mankind, and to lay your gifts at his feet to be divinely used. So is given to mortals the honor of sharing the toil and travail which shall bring his kingdom in. Let but men's hearts respond, and satisfaction and joy, high as the heavens, deep as the ocean, shall be theirs. In place of the tragedy of the unattained, shall be the glory of reaching life's sublimest goal."

As we bade him farewell, deep in our soul we heard the voice of Infinite Love calling to us. And the heart responded:

"O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee."

## IV

## THE STORY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

"CAN I remember what happened on that eventful day?"

It was thus that Samaritan woman met our question.

"Could I ever forget? Every detail is stamped indelibly upon my mind. I was born and brought up in Sychar. The name may be familiar to you, for it was there that our father Jacob settled centuries ago. For several years I had been away, returning only when my dreams of happiness had been shattered. But I did not intend to talk about that, and yet it is part of my story. I had left there when I married young Eliakim. He was my first love, but—not my last. Our marriage turned out disastrously. We parted. Then—Creon, the young Greek, came into my life, followed by Lysias, the Roman official. But why go into those sordid details? Suffice it to say that, when my parents died, I returned to Sychar to claim my inheritance, such as it was, and to take up my abode in the home of my childhood.

"I was now practically alone, but truth to tell I was past caring. I had seen so much of the world that my standards had changed. I was now hard and cynical. It had never occurred to me, however, that my kins-

folk and the neighbors of the town who had never journeyed far beyond its border, would view me with disfavor. I ought, doubtless, to have realized it. But when I did, it was too late. By their standards I was an outcast. By their narrow judgment, as I called it, I was beneath contempt. They showed it. I tried to brazen it out, pretending I did not mind what they thought or said. Alas! I still had a woman's heart and a woman's pride. Had these folk been strangers, their dark looks, their whisperings, and their cruel comments would have meant little to me. As it was, knowing me as they did, and my mother and father before me, it was gall and wormwood.

"Tobias, who was with me, laughed at my annoyance, and tried to solace me in the disgrace I felt. But the thoughts engendered by those gossiping tongues rankled in my bosom. So I avoided my neighbors as much as possible. One thing was certain. I could no longer go to the well at the morning hour when the other women were there. That I solemnly vowed! And I began to go at midday, when the blistering sun had driven them indoors, and when drowsiness wrapped the place about. You perhaps wondered why I chose that hour. Now I have given the actual reason.

"One memorable day I left home as usual with my earthen vessel to draw water. Had Tobias been less indolent and selfish, he might have saved me that distasteful labor, even though it were customary for the women to undertake it. But he was lazy and shiftless,

a ne'er-do-well who was content to live on my money, and—God pity me!—I could not rid myself of him, so desperate and heart-hungry was I, tortured also by memories of a long-dead innocence. The well lay on the outskirts of the town, and as I walked along I forced myself to sing a song I had heard in the bazaars of Damascus. The fact is, I was intensely miserable, although I refused to give way to depression. Conscience was troubling me. Old voices, that I had thought were silent forever, had been making their protests in my soul. I sang, therefore, to drown them.

"As I passed beyond the houses, and drew near to the well, I was surprised to see a man seated upon the stonework. I appraised him at once. None is keener than the practiced eye of a woman like myself. I perceived that he was a stranger. Moreover, I marked well that he was young and handsome. That he was a Jew I could plainly tell by his dress. But as I came up to him I felt that there was an indefinable air of distinction about him at which my heart leaped. Who was he? How came he to be there? Was he traveling alone, or, if not, where were his companions? Any other woman of our race would probably have retraced her steps and gone back without her water, rather than face a stranger. At any rate, she would have approached with averted gaze. I had, however, long outgrown that. I looked him full in the eyes, debating whether I should speak first.

"There was something that drew me and stirred me

to the core of my being. I was casting about in my mind to frame some casual greeting, when he broke the silence by saying, 'Give me to drink.' The voice was gentle, and the tones appealing. His request gave me the opportunity I wished of conversing with him.

" 'How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?' I said. 'For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.'

"Looking back, I realize that it was a foolish remark. Without doubt he would know why the two nations were at enmity with each other. After the ancient kingdom of Israel had been led away captive, as perchance you have heard, the Assyrian king repeopled the land with others of a different race. We had grown up with our own modes of life. Our customs were different from those of the Jews across the border, and partly because of that, partly because we were of alien descent, there was little love lost between us.

"I was afraid at first that he might take seriously what I had meant only in jest, and I was angry with myself for having said it. It occurred to me that I had lost something of my old skill.

"I was relieved, however, when I saw his friendly look. With a smile, he replied, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink: thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.' What did he mean by that? I could not make it out. I had an idea that either he was trifling or else that he was pretending to

be a magician. I had already noted that, unlike most travelers, he had no leathern bucket at hand wherewith to obtain water. That is why I said to him banteringly, 'Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?'

"A look of sadness flitted momentarily across his countenance. Then in even gentler tones he replied, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.'

"I was thunderstruck. That sounded sincere enough, and I was almost convinced that he indeed must possess magic. Had he power to call forth water at will, even as Moses, of whom the Jews boasted continually, who brought water out of a rock? My mind was working with lightning-like rapidity. Suppose he could do that? If he would impart his secret to me, one of the chief annoyances of my life—and oh, how weary I was of it all!—would be gone forever. That toilsome trudge beneath the midday sun would be a thing of the past. So I answered, 'Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.'

"I had scarcely spoken the words when I blamed myself for my credulity. Doubtless, this was some

misguided fellow who possibly thought he could call forth gushing springs at will—a mild maniac—or else, more probably, he was but making game of me. Resentment filled my mind. I resolved that I would fill my pitcher without another word and go back. I had already lowered the bucket when suddenly I felt that he was gazing at me. I paused motionless. His eyes seemed to be searching every nook and cranny of my soul. All my self-assurance vanished. I stood there looking mutely at him, waiting for him to speak, and yet instinctively dreading what he might say. Then what to others might have passed for a simple and natural request smote me like a rod. 'Go,' said he, 'call thy husband, and come hither.'

"I knew it! Those eyes had missed nothing. He had opened the volume of the years—a volume I had thought locked safely away from human scrutiny. It was as though he were turning page after page, marred as they were by misdeeds and shameful wrongdoing, and stained in places with tears. By a supreme effort I assumed an air of unconcern. 'I have no husband,' I remarked. And I busied myself with the bucket, intending to escape without delay.

"But it was in vain. I might have known it! Something told me that nothing was hidden from his divine gaze. 'Thou hast well said, I have no husband,' he answered; 'for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband; in that saidst thou truly.'

"The blood rushed to my cheeks. At all costs, I realized I must flee from such dangerous ground, and, summoning all my native wit, I said, with a touch of sarcasm, 'Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.' It was useless! I had half hoped that he would have been incensed at my words. That was the underlying purpose of them, for I knew I must bring this conversation to an end. A look of pity and sorrow still lingered on his face, as do the tints that glow in the evening sky after the sun has set.

"An access of confidence came to me. To retreat was to admit that I had had the worst of the encounter, and I would not do it. So again I attempted to divert his attention to matters less personal. With a show of earnestness, I said, 'Our fathers worshiped in this mountain: and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Breathing a sigh of relief, I awaited his reply, smiling to myself then because my plan had to some extent succeeded, for his manner became somewhat easier.

" 'Ye worship ye know not what,' he answered. 'We know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.'

"With a glow of pleasure at my astuteness, I listened. This was an old controversy between the Jews

and ourselves, and his display of interest showed that he was not averse to discussing it. What he meant by his emphasis on spirituality and sincerity I could not discern at that moment. That did not trouble me greatly. I had secured the twofold object for which I had been striving: to draw his attention away from my private affairs, and to show him that, no matter what my past had been, I was not entirely irreligious. My composure had returned. I was myself again. With a touch of exultation I said, 'I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.' His countenance became strangely solemn again, and yet wondrously transformed, as he said quietly, but firmly, 'I that speak unto thee am he.'

"I looked at him. In spite of the regal dignity enthroned upon his brow, I noted the peasant garb, the strong hands developed by toil, the well-worn sandals on his feet. A thousand questions surged within my brain. What could he mean? The Messiah?—the Christ?—the long-awaited Deliverer promised by Jehovah to his ancient people? These were some of the thoughts beating like tumultuous billows in my heart, yet to none of them could I give utterance. I regarded him with rapt astonishment. I was awed—subdued. My reason told me that such a claim was both ridiculous and absurd. Yet my soul seemed to detect that to which my reasoning was blind. I could not speak nor move. I was like one turned to stone, lost in amazement with which blended an element of reverence. Had

I been able, I think I would have flung myself at his feet in adoration.

"It could not have been more than a moment, although it seemed like an eternity, when I was suddenly brought back to reality by the voices of some men approaching from the town. I judged that they had been there to buy food. Apparently they were his friends. Either he had been too weary to accompany them, or else he had preferred to remain there in solitude by the brink of the well. I have since thought that there must have been some divine ordering of those events. Otherwise I would have missed him, even as I had failed to meet his followers as they entered Sychar. Fearing that my presence might embarrass him, and filled with a consuming desire to make known my discovery, I forgot all about the water I had come to draw. My one thought was to tell everyone of him whom I had found. Their scornful looks and sneering words did not matter now. They would not spurn me when I was the bearer of such tidings. Probably there was some conceit mixed with my wish to impart the momentous news, but there it was.

"Raising my voice, as I hurried down the street, I called to this one and that by name. There was alarm on the part of some, and contempt written large on the faces of others, but what cared I?

" 'Come!' I cried. 'Hasten, everyone! Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?'

"They poured out after me, some still rubbing their eyes and complaining because their midday repose had been unduly broken, and others openly saying that I had taken leave of my senses. But I urged them on, and at length brought them to his feet.

"He was standing there in the midst of his disciples, and I noticed how commanding was his figure. He was tall and well-proportioned, strong as the cedars of Lebanon, and, notwithstanding his travel-stained garments, he looked a king of men. His friends had, I think, been trying to press food upon him, for I overheard him say, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields: for they are white already to harvest.'

"As he uttered these words, some glimmering of their meaning reached me. My first thought was that he was speaking of the land lying about us, with its carpet of green spread out by the beneficent hand of Nature. But when he said that there were four months before the harvest, and yet spoke of that field being white already, I knew that he referred to the harvest of souls. His outstretched hand indicated, not the soil, but the people around him, and others still straggling from their homes. His words were both a parable and a prophecy.

"For two days he remained with us. All work was at a standstill. Our differences were forgotten. My

neighbors' detestation of me had vanished. It was as though heaven itself had opened, and the illumination of the eternal majesty had come to transfigure our poor, distorted lives. We hung upon his words. Never had such kindly counsel and sympathy flowed forth from one heart to another. But it was not merely that he taught us, as we gathered about him in the freshness of the morning and the calm of the evening. Even more weighty, more searching yet healing, were the words he spoke to those who sought him in private. Many a heart, as I know full well, found relief from burdens which had long oppressed it. Many a soul found pardon, deliverance, and peace. And such was I!

"There are some things too sacred for speech. His dealings with me are among them. But let me say this: never had I before seen the heinousness of sin or the grandeur of goodness. I yearned for purity as a thirst-stricken mariner, tossing at the mercy of the turbulent waves, craves water. I longed for honor, for virtue, for happiness, and God. And they came! A new life was mine. It sprang up as, from the miry bed of a wayside pool, the water lily uprears its head and opens its glistening petals to the sunshine.

"All too quickly the time of parting drew nigh. He must perforce resume his journey. And as we watched him and his disciples move out along the road toward Jerusalem, I listened to the glad voices of those who were no longer bitter against me. 'Now we believe,' said they, 'not because of thy saying: for we

have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

"That is my story, from which I have omitted nothing, painful though the telling has been. And that for me was the beginning of days. To meet with him, as I did, is to discover that this is indeed the Messiah, who can tell us all things about life, ourselves, and the infinite love and mercy of God. Better still, to those who surrender to his sovereign sway, no matter how grievous their sins, how marred their lives, Jesus can bring redemption, forgiveness, and that harmony with the will divine, that make the soul rejoice with exceeding great joy."

## V

## THE STORY OF A CERTAIN LAWYER

"PERHAPS it was my fault. Nay, looking back, I have no excuse to offer. I was without doubt worthy of blame. I ought not to have been a party to a scheme so despicable as that which the Pharisees had planned. Of that, I am now well assured."

We looked at the lawyer to whom we had been presented. Frankly, we were surprised at his candor. We had barely mentioned the name of the Galilean, when he startled us with his open avowal of disgust at the part he had played. Yet, not to interrupt his narrative, we said nothing by way of comment.

"Of course, I ought to have known, familiar as I was with the elders and the animosity they cherished, that it was only a trap. They had grown increasingly hostile to Jesus during those months. I had heard—though I scarcely credited it—that they had even been spying upon him. If they could have discovered something about his private life that was unseemly, or had been able to fix some charge against him, terrible though it must sound to you, they would have been overjoyed. The worst they could say of him, however, was that he was a friend of the outcasts. And yet that was rather to his credit. The Lord alone knew how pitiable

the plight of those to whom life held out no promise of good. A friend is what all men need, and what those who are most in need of one seldom find.

"Still, I digress. They came to me, urging that, in the name of Moses, and out of reverence for his teaching, I should ask Jesus concerning the life eternal. What must a man do to merit it? One might have perceived that there was some craftiness behind such a question. But, though you may still remain unconvinced, verily I say to you, that I discerned no evil. In some ways, I suppose, I had previously proved my concern for the rigid observance of the Mosaic commands, and thus the choice of being an emissary had fallen upon me. Looking back, I see now how specious was the request that those critics of Jesus framed. Had I been more wary, I would have scorned to be made their tool, for although I was one of the scribes, I had no taste for the subtle schemings which emanated from the fertile brain of the former high priest, Annas.

"Still, let that pass. I will tell you what happened. It was in Jerusalem. Truly, as I beheld the multitude that surrounded him, I inwardly shrank from the duty laid upon me. The people hung on his words. The magic spell of his eloquence swept them as do the winds that blow through the harvest field or—perhaps more fittingly—like the fingers of the harpist upon the strings. Never had I looked on a sight so moving, nor listened to a voice which so held me in thrall. Yes, I almost forgot the object of my coming. For, while

one must confess to some pride of position and education which, as I deemed it, this Teacher lacked, yet apart from that there was no malice in my heart against him. Had there been, it would have been cast out by the gracious words to which I gave heed.

"As he drew to the end of his teachings, I discreetly pressed forward. There were some three or four others of the scribes with me but they kept on the fringe of the crowd. So before the people dispersed, I put my question to him, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'

"Disquietude filled my mind as Jesus turned upon me, and inquired, 'What is written in the law? how readest thou?'

"And I answering said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself.'

"And he said unto me, 'Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.'

"There was a semblance of defeat in the position into which he had almost imperceptibly forced me. Well I knew that what I had accomplished would not satisfy those who sent me. For, do you not see? With surprising skill, he had compelled me to answer my own question. However, in order to get some pronouncement from him I demanded, 'And who is my neighbor?'

"I told you before that I was disquieted as I spoke to him? Well, now I was dismayed as he began to

relate one of those incomparable stories from real life for which he was noted. Shooting a glance at the upturned faces about him, I listened spellbound. Verily, even as others did once testify concerning him, 'Never man spake like this man.'

"But you ask, what was the theme he thus unfolded? Have patience, my friend, you shall also be moved to marvel as I narrate it. But withhold your questions until I am done, for I do not want you to miss the meaning of his story.

"The winding track that ran for seventeen miles between Jerusalem and Jericho lay before our eyes as the tale was told. It was known to us as 'The Bloody Way,' and it truly deserved the designation. The manner in which it wound through the hills, its remoteness from men's habitations, and the rocks and caves skirting the road, made it a favorite place for brigands. Yet as it was the most convenient route between the capital and Jericho, it was used in spite of its disadvantages.

"On this lonely way a solitary traveler journeyed, engrossed in thought. Trade had been good, at least, so I surmise. He had turned all his merchandise into money, and well satisfied with the work of the day, he was returning, glad to get away from the noise and clamor of the city. Suddenly, as the track turned around the shoulder of a hill, he found himself confronted, surrounded, ambushed! They are upon him in overwhelming force. He is stunned. He falls un-

conscious. And with practiced fingers, the brigands strip him of his garments in which the money has been concealed, leaving him bleeding to death on the side of the road.

"He had no knowledge of time, but in the recurring moments of consciousness he felt that the end was near unless help came swiftly. Footsteps? Was there hope? He was too weak to call out, but he, doubtless, trusted that if this were another traveler, at least he would put him in an easier position that he might die in peace. He could not see who it was, but as Jesus spoke, we could. It was a priest, journeying to Jericho, having fulfilled his period of service at the Temple. He took in at a glance the meaning of the huddled form on the other side of the road. There had been highway robbery, with violence. But then, he himself was a man of peace. His functions had to do with another world, not with this. So mumbling his prayers, or possibly some precept about the judgments which befell the unrighteous, he kept away from the sickening spectacle. As far as he was concerned, the incident was ended.

"Even when the Levite appeared on the scene, things were little better. He too had been on duty at the Temple. He had helped in the preparation of the sacrifices. He had seen the Mosaic ceremonial carefully carried out. Yet he had not learned, any more than the priest, the meaning of the divine word, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' Coming suddenly upon the forlorn figure of the traveler, he was sufficiently curious

to cross over to where he lay. Any words of pity were, however, probably cut short by the sound of hoofs approaching. It would not do for him to be seen there, so the Levite recrossed the road, and with down-turned head, as though engaged in pious meditation, resumed his journey.

"The newcomer could be recognized by his attire as a Samaritan. His eyes fell on someone lying by the roadside. Then as he drew nearer, he saw that it was a traveler—a Jew. Apparently, he had been almost done to death. Kneeling down beside the wounded wayfarer, the Samaritan found that the man's heart was still beating. He pressed a cordial to the pale lips. And tearing strips of cloth from his garments, he stanched the blood, and bound up his wounds. By and by, he was rewarded by seeing the man's eyes open.

"The next difficulty was what to do with the unfortunate victim. To leave him there was out of the question. All the time, there was the risk of some further attack by the brigands. Tenderly the Samaritan raised the man in his arms, placed him on the saddle of his beast, and supporting him against his own shoulder, they slowly moved along the way. It was evening by the time they reached the inn on the Jericho road, and all that night, he tended the stricken traveler. Next morning, it was evident that the man was still in a serious condition, and further rest and care were necessary. So the landlord was summoned, and

having given him instructions to afford every attention to the poor fellow, the Samaritan bade his friend farewell, and pressed a couple of denarii into the landlord's hand, with the promise of payment in full on his return.

"I have related the story to you to the best of my ability, although I may have omitted some of the details. Certainly, I have not told it as did he. As the narrative came to an end, every eye was upon the Galilean. There was a kindly note in the voice, and I think, a look of mirth in his eyes as he turned to me and inquired, 'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?'

"I smiled half-dubiously. I do not mind admitting that I thought there was some jest behind the question, or perhaps a well-concealed trap into which I might fall to my own confusion. Conning his words over in my mind, however, I could discover nothing amiss. So striving to appear at ease, I replied, 'He that showed mercy on him.'

"You will believe me when I tell you that I was not prepared for his rejoinder. Although he betrayed no trace of anger, I felt, intuitively, that he had been reading my heart. It was evidently plain to him that I had not come as an earnest seeker after truth, for, when I had rightly pointed out which of the three had proved most neighborly, Jesus said, 'Go, and do thou likewise.'

"On my homeward way, I lived through that story again. It was only then that the full significance of it

struck me. Those four men were drawn by the hand of a master. The wounded traveler, lying there by the roadside, slowly bleeding to death, clearly symbolized many of my people. The priest and the Levite certainly stood for the representatives of religion, correct in its ritual. It was right that the commands of the Law should be carried out to the letter. We were in honor bound to offer Jehovah of our best. And it was seemly and proper that, with scrupulous care, the sacrifices of the Temple should be presented to him. Yet I was not so dull of mind not to know the Master's meaning. Our worship was but formal. Our religious duties were barren of good deeds. We had lost sight of the spiritual in the material, of real faith in its forms. I recalled that Jesus himself had once said of us, 'Ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.' Thus our doctrines were above reproach; our deeds—alas!—almost beneath contempt.

"Why do I condemn myself and my brethren? Truly, you have only to look at the fourth man, belonging as he did to the despised and hated race of Samaria, to see the Master's point. Had I been asked which of the three would have rendered help to that forlorn man in the dust, without having heard the story, it would certainly not have been this fellow. But there, in that Samaritan, whom he had so vividly described, did I

see how poor and unworthy were the petty distinctions we loved to make. We looked down on those of Samaria as unbelievers, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. What did they know of the true worship of Jehovah? What right had they to anything but scorn and obliquy? And yet—yet—this man had actually done what our faith so loudly professed to do, yet never did! We were so self-righteous, so satisfied with ourselves, that we had neither time nor thought for the fallen, the defiled, and even the sore wounded on life's way.

"It is, perhaps, not to be wondered at that, with ill-concealed wrath and some frankness of speech, did I return to those who had sent me on such a fruitless errand. I told those of the Sanhedrin whom I met of my experience. I poured hot rebuke on their heads. Yet, let me say this, it was not simply that I felt they had placed me in a position I loathed, now that I saw the full implications of my mission. It was rather that, while we spent time in splitting hairs about things that had no real import, while we were cudgeling our brains how we might discredit this Teacher of Galilee, he was doing what the world needed most of all.

"Now, after the flight of years, I am positive that he was right, and we were wrong. What does man require? Surely, not the endless discussions of theories we had spun like cobwebs, serving only to entrap the unwary. Surely, not our speculations and arguments; certainly not our base plotting against him who was,

I am now persuaded, the Holy One of God. And more would I say: The word of the saintly Micah came back to me. With telling force, he had demanded, 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' And with that picture of the Good Samaritan before my eyes, and that authoritative command of Jesus ringing in my ears, I too have tried, from that hour since, to follow his teaching and example, and to bring succor and hope to the despairing along life's road.

"As, in the calm light of eventide, one sees the landscape more clearly than in the midday hours of blistering heat, so now in the sunset of my life I discern what before was hidden. The truth about the Galilean has grown more apparent. There was never a man like him before or since. There never can be. I had gone out expecting to meet one who was uncultured and illiterate, because he did not belong to our caste. And lo! I found One who saw what our eyes had vainly sought. I had gone out expecting to hear a carpenter, and lo! I found the Christ.

"That makes what followed the harder for me to contemplate. The illegal meeting of the Sanhedrin, in which the scheming of many months culminated, is a bitter memory. I could not record my vote against Jesus, but I did not vote for his acquittal. The charges we brought against him before Pontius Pilate were false, and we knew it. The shameful death meted out

to him on Golgotha is stamped on my heart. But the resurrection of that Master, despite all the precautions taken by my colleagues to prevent it, leaves but one conviction—as conclusive, as it is inescapable—this is indeed the Christ of God."

## VI

## THE STORY OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

"YEA, truly. If it be the widow of Lemuel, the just, whom you seek, lo! she stands before you."

"But it was a woman of Syrophoenicia," we replied. "Are you she whose daughter was so wondrously healed by the great Master?"

"Assuredly. I am not, as you can see, of the people of Israel, although I have long served the Lord Jehovah. But what do you need of me? If you are also a lover of Christ, you cannot ask anything that I will not do if it be within my power."

"It is this," we answered. "We have learned of that faith which Jesus, our Lord, commended, and of that persistence which bore fruit in such plenitude. Tell us, if we do not ask too much, and if we are not intruding on your privacy of memory, the story of that day."

She looked at us with manifest interest, as though we had unwittingly touched a secret spring unlocking the treasure chest of remembrance.

"Then it is necessary that I should tell you of my early years. I was born in Sidon, and therefore, as I have said, did not belong to the Jewish nation. But

when love enters the human heart, it takes little note of the barriers of either birth or belief. And so, when we met, Lemuel and I, it was love at first sight.

"I perceive that you are incredulous," she added. "You do not believe it could be so?"

"Nay," we hastened to reply. "You misjudge us. It was rather betokening our pleasure that one had stumbled upon an old-world romance. Mankind has grown so prosaic and matter-of-fact."

"Be that as it may. I know not. This I do know that it was even as I have said. And, what is also true, costly was the price it required of us."

Her face grew tense. A far-away look was in her eyes. We knew she was back in those days of halcyon hours, and we waited, assured that the narrative would be of interest.

"Wait! I will fulfil my promise. And if you are patient, you shall hear of what, for long years, I have kept locked up in my heart. We loved each other with the first passion of our young souls. Never had I met one so noble of bearing, so erect and strong, and yet of such a gentle and generous nature as Lemuel. And if it were true, even as he told me—and you will forgive what may sound like idle vanity—there was none so fair, so lovely to look upon, as I. Again if he were to be believed, no voice sounded so musical in the ears of man as mine. Nor did any rival me in grace of form. You cannot believe that, seeing me as I am now. But, remember, sorrow and suffering stood at my side

through the years, and neither deal lightly with a woman's beauty.

"But of the price exacted for our love I must speak. My father was a Phoenician merchant. He was both wealthy and proud. And when Lemuel, my well-beloved, sought my hand in honorable marriage, my father was furious. Lemuel was a Jew, and the people of Israel were hated and detested because they were aliens; because, too, as I cannot conceal from you, they were shrewd and capable in trade. Therefore the loss of former business followed their coming to Canaan. And so, vengeful and implacable, my father turned him from our door, and forbade him to speak with me again. Yet with love such as ours that was impossible. I said so. It was doubtless wrong and was much to be condemned, but youth is impulsive and the blood is hot. I told my father to his face that he was unjust. I defied him to forbid our marriage. At all costs, I was resolved to follow the dictates of my heart. Would you not have done the same?"

Without waiting for any reply, she proceeded.

"Seeing I was determined upon that course, he turned upon me, flaming with anger. He bade me never to look upon his face again. He called down the curses of his house upon me, upon him who had lured me from my ancient people, and upon the children who might bear our name. But Lemuel, although he pleaded with me to count the cost, knew how I loved him. And so at length, laughing away my fears, he took me to

his own kindred. That, however, was but the beginning of sorrows! When they learned that he had married a Canaanite, they refused to harbor me or give me shelter even within their borders. They told my husband he must choose between me and them, between hardship and home, poverty and comfort. Affrighted at such a calamitous happening, I begged him, yea, implored him on my knees, to forget me. But valiant as he was, he made the choice thus thrust upon him by his callous family. He chose me—me and exile, hardship, and poverty.

"We returned to my country, but ah! Lord God, how cruel can men be! Those of my own race shunned him because he was a Jew. They shamed me because I was his. And with every man's hand against us, with the wolf of Want ever skulking with bared fangs and burning eyes outside the door, we strove to live. Still, as Lemuel recalled from the sacred scroll of his faith, 'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.' And when he regarded me with that tenderness with which he infolded me, and thought me still unconvinced, he would also say, 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.'

"Truly, love was our compensation; that and our faith in the beneficent hand of the Lord. For Lemuel had led me also into the glorious promises of Jehovah. And as he loved and trusted God, so did I learn to do. At times, however, I could not help wondering if my

father's words had affected our fortunes. Nor was it without good cause, as I will show you. But I am anticipating what I would say. For a brief season the cup of gladness was filled high. Our little Judith came. We called her so for the gracious mother who had borne my husband, but who had died in his boyhood. 'For,' he said, 'next to yourself, my mother was a queen among women. And I would that our child should be as fair and true as both she and you.' But our hopes were doomed. Judith was weak and ailing from her birth. Worse, she was afflicted with some mysterious malady. The kindly light of reason was absent from her face. She needed skill we could not afford, and comforts we could not secure. And then my soul grew bitter indeed. It was not, believe me, that I rebelled against the orderings of God. The Most Holy is ofttimes blamed for the malicious wrongs perpetrated by men themselves. God was blameless. My father's prejudice and vengeful spirit were alone responsible for the misery we endured.

"Still I could not put from me the memory of his curse. I brooded over it and wept over it. Nor did I do this only in secret. My faith had well-nigh gone. I spoke to my husband of the dread that filled my soul. He reassured me. He cheered me with protestations of his undying love for me and the child God had given to us. He was so pure of heart that he could see the divine wings overshadowing us, and he told me con-

fidently that, though sorrow might endure for a night, joy would come in the morning.

"Alas! he did not know how long the night, nor how thick the darkness was to be. Nor did I, but I was to learn that. His labor and thought for us had, together with the scant fare with which he had been content, undermined his strength. And stricken with fever, he suddenly laid down the unequal fight, and I was left to battle alone. Again like a pitiless torrent, doubts, fears, and misgiving swept over me with devastating force. I bore it all as well as I could. Then, beating down my pride, I made my way, with my afflicted Judith, back to the house of my father. I should not have done it. Had I not been almost bereft of my senses, I would have known that the journey must prove fruitless. And yet, I thought that Judith's pale and wasted face, in which her great eyes gleamed like stars, would melt his ice-bound heart. But before I could tell him about my needs, he drove me from his threshold like a thing accursed. And verily, in my heart, I felt I was. A ban seemed to rest upon me.

"Notwithstanding all I had suffered, there was something that still bade me hope on. Call it a mother's intuition if you will, it was there. Nor was it without significance. For not many days after, it became known among us that a Man of marvelous powers and tenderest sympathy had come to our coasts, even to Tyre. His name you have guessed. It was Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth. Good news needs no wings.

It travels as swift as the wind. And what he had done for the suffering and despairing in Galilee and Judea had already been talked about. And my heart leaped with the thought of my Judith. I knew that he belonged to the Hebrew people, and that they, and they alone, had claim upon his compassion. But although my heart and head were at variance, the heart counseled me speedily to go to him and invoke his aid. 'Folly,' said the head; 'Attempt,' said the heart. And so, although the journey was long, and the gain seemed doubtful, I went, nerving my heavy feet with the assurance that perhaps, even though I was an alien, he would have pity upon me."

We could not refrain from breaking in on her narrative. "O woman, well was it said of thee, 'Great is thy faith!' "

"Tarry a moment," she replied, though plainly gratified by our words. "You shall hear that which will move your soul to wonder. I found him with some difficulty, for his dwelling was in the poorest and most populous part of the town. I confess that I had expected him to be living in a more fitting state. And I was somewhat disappointed. Greater and more real, however, was the disappointment that was still to come. He was just leaving the house as I approached. There were many people passing to and fro, but I was undismayed. 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David,' I cried. 'My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.' But, to my astonishment, it was as

though my plea had fallen on deaf ears. He heeded me not. And as I lifted up my voice and wailed, some of those with him urged him to send me away. But, as I was yet to learn, he was too kindly for that. Instead, he regarded me steadfastly a moment, and then said quietly, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Whether that was intended to be final or not, I fell at his feet, crying out in the agony of a mother's love, 'Lord, help me!'

"Thereupon, he raised me gently to my feet, and leading me into the house he bade me speak fully of that which oppressed me. As I unburdened my soul of its tragic story, I saw he was greatly moved. His eyes—wondrous they were: piercing and majestical, yet kindly—were misted over as I spoke. And my heart swelled with hope as I finished. It seemed assured that he would respond to my piteous plea. Yet that made it the more poignant when he said, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.'

"Although that was a familiar proverb amongst us, I recoiled as from a blow. Was that a firm refusal? Did he intend thus to dismiss me? 'Yea, truly,' said this old head of mine. 'You have some self-respect left. Take your leave. Quit one so uncaring, and so hard of soul.' And I would have obeyed had I not seen the gleam of sympathy in those eyes. Again my heart took up the issue. 'He is but testing your earnestness of purpose, and the depths of your desire. Persist! Sue unto him!' Therefore I took new courage and

said, 'Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.'

"Would that you could have seen the glow of supreme satisfaction that suffused his countenance as he listened. He had tried my faith. He read the petitions crowding my heart, but to which I could give no utterance. There also he saw my reverent love for Jehovah, and my trust that, by his divine ordering, good for my child should yet come to gladden my life. With a regal gesture, he placed his hand on my shoulder. 'O woman,' he said, 'great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

"I knew not what to say. My tongue had been ready with glib replies a moment before, but now it refused to move. Yet, though no word of gratitude could I utter, I am sure that he perceived what I wanted to say. Swiftly I retraced my steps. I was like one who dreamed. I was walking on air. To think that, after all the weary years that had added their toll of misery to the burden I carried, such a blessing had come to me! It was as though a crushing load had been lifted from my spirit, even as I had seen the camels at eventide relieved of the weight they had borne beneath the scorching sun. And yet, unbelievable though some might think it, no thought entered my mind that it could be too good to be true. My child was healed! I knew it. The words rang in the chambers of my being like chiming bells. They sang in my soul like the melodious chant of angels.

"The walls of Sidon were before me. I passed through the gates. I sped along the streets leading to my home, noting the curious looks of the idlers. They must have thought from the excitement that now gripped me that I, too, had become demented like my daughter. And then I paused, my hand upon the latch. For the first time, a question arose in my mind. How would I find the child of my love? Would there be the same dejected air, the same sad eyes turning at the sound of the opening door? Impulsively, I threw it back. A glad cry of recognition greeted me. It was my Judith—the priceless jewel of my widowhood. And her arms were flung about my neck, as I rained kisses upon her.

"Down on my knees I fell. Ah, not the despondent suppliant of a few hours before, but the liberated, thankful soul of a woman to whom the great God had, in his infinite mercy, shown his boundless compassion. I laughed; I wept for sheer joy. And as I clasped my child to my bosom, do you wonder that I vowed that henceforth I would devote myself to works of mercy for every desolate heart? Yea, I would also lead the feet of my daughter into that path of noble service and gracious womanhood that can be fraught with such boundless good to the world. Now I could defy circumstances that threatened to overwhelm me. I had found that faith in the mighty power of the Son of God which nothing could shake. And the love of

Judith was ever unto me a mirror that showed me anew what the love of God must be.

"Yea, it is even so. God is good. And in the Son of his love has he given us proof of it. Did not my Lemuel say, 'Joy cometh in the morning'? And to every prayerful heart, overwhelmed with life's happenings or oppressed with ill, would I say this: You have but to go to Christ, in humble yet believing faith, to find relief. For never can he betray the trust of the seeking heart. Tell me, now that you have heard my testimony, is not that so?"

## VII

## THE STORY OF ZACCHAEUS, THE TAXGATHERER

THE sun had set in a ruddy glow that left the western sky encrimsoned and gorgeous. On the edge of the market place, from which most of the traders had gone by this time, stood a low, rambling structure. A balustrade of brick ran parallel with the front, and on the right was a wide, unglazed opening, fitted with a counter. This was used for unpacking the bales of merchandise or the panniers taken from the asses and camels of the travelers. And we were convinced that we had not followed in vain the directions given to us. A venerable figure, seated cross-legged upon a rug, and intent on a written tablet before him, looked up in friendly fashion in response to our greeting. He motioned to us to be seated.

"The story of my life?" he asked. "But, surely, that can be of but little worth and less interest to your friends. Moreover, they would scarcely comprehend it."

"But why not?" we persisted. "Does not all misunderstanding arise from partial knowledge? No better way of forming and forging friendships can be found than by learning more of each other. Besides, it may

be that your excessive modesty diminishes the value of your testimony only in your own eyes. Therefore, tell it to us, we beg you."

A far-away look came into the face of Zacchaeus as he murmured, "Then it shall be as you wish."

"Many years have passed since I first came to these parts. I was born and reared far from the city clamor, amid the vales of Gilead. And though it may sound but empty boasting, in my youth I was neither wild nor vicious. On the contrary, I was consumed with eagerness to find some place in the world where I might secure for myself some measure of comfort, and enjoy the good that can be had by those who have the means.

"Still, when I say it was for myself, that is hardly the truth. It was for Ruth. She was my beloved. We had long plighted our troth, but I was too provident to seek an early marriage. Moreover, I saw no means of ever reaching the goal I coveted unless I left the narrow confines of my home, and went abroad into the world. I will keep nothing from you. Nathan, a merchant, and my father's brother, had told me and also a companion of my youth, one Levi, one means of becoming rich. He was wise, was Nathan. He did not hide from us that all things have their price. And even this chance of preferment, he said, must be bought, although not with gold."

"Then with what, Zacchaeus? With goods in trade?" we inquired, more to show interest than anything else.

"With patriotism—by forfeiting family and friends when our course became known—even by sacrificing honor. It was to enter the service of certain men of our nation, who had contracted with the Romans to gather the dues from our people. The method of that time was to intrust the collection of taxes to some of my race, who in turn appointed their own officials. They were required to obtain a fixed sum each year from the people, by way of revenue for imperial Rome, and they were themselves paid a part of that money for work done. Of course, this led to extortion and excess, as can be readily seen, for all concerned in the traffic naturally saw to it that ample margin was allowed for the gain due to them. It also appeared reasonable to those who collected the dues from travelers and merchants passing through our cities. The grim humor of it was not, perhaps, fully appreciated by them. To be under the yoke of the conqueror was not sufficient boon in itself! They had also the privilege of paying to be oppressed!

"Do you wonder, then, that all men hated us? We were denounced for having sided with the alien. What is more, some said we had sold our souls for his silver. Possibly we had. I would not, however, have acknowledged as much then. As I viewed it, it was a matter of business, and nothing more. Taxes must be levied. Someone must collect them. And who could better gauge a Jew's capacity to pay or match his wiles than one of his brethren? So I reasoned with myself. And

thus the protests of my family, and even of my own heart, I silenced.

"Yet strange indeed is it how one's early ideas prevail. Although I had been forced to adjust myself to an entirely new situation, there were some points on which my better self seemed at variance. With tiresome persistence, which became at times unendurable, the old commandments of Moses would recur to my mind. 'Thou shalt not steal,' said one. 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' another enjoined. So I set myself to combat what appeared to me, in that mood, to be impracticable counsels. Because I made the best of my chances, why should I regard that as stealing? Were I to levy only the exact dues from the traders who passed my barrier, they would certainly charge one with extortion. Why not, therefore, give them adequate cause for complaint? Again, sooner or later, they would probably fall into the clutches of brigands, who would indeed rob them. Why, then, allow good money to pass into wicked hands? Then again, it was beyond question that at least a portion of what I collected went to uphold law and order, and made for security! And by impoverishing the traveler in this manner, I made him less worth waylaying! So, indirectly, was I not discouraging violence?

"You will revile me, but so did I spin my web of sophistry to ensnare a too-active conscience. I tried to drug it into insensibility that it might no longer plague me. But there was also another command that,

I now freely confess, troubled me beyond measure. And Ruth herself was the cause of it. I omitted, in recalling those distant days, to tell you of our union. Not many months had passed in my new calling before preferment came. Both Levi and I were fortunate above our fellows—so they churlishly avowed. The truth is, we were more skilful in business. A merchant might seek to undervalue his possessions, but we knew better. Another might plead his inability to pay the dues demanded; we had our own ways of bringing him to heel. Consequently, to more important centers, where the trade-routes passed, were we called—Levi to Capernaum, and I here to Jericho.

"This is one of the most important posts in the country. It stands on the road from the province of Perea to that of Judea, which means that all goods destined for Egypt must come this way. Moreover, the balm for which Gilead is famed was sent through our city to the far corners of the earth. And the trade yielded a large return. Thus was the door opened for my marriage. And although my family had disowned me, with an abundance of reproaches for having thrown in my lot with the so-called enemies of the people, Ruth clave to me with all the affection of her heart.

"Never did a woman love a man more. Of that I am well assured. Yet, strangely enough, of that very love she made a scourge with which to torment my soul. For what did she say? Verily, that, as our fathers made for themselves a calf of gold, so I had shaped

another deity of the same metal—a golden idol—to which I rendered unceasing homage. That was, of course, merely a woman's whim so to regard my position. She could not understand business! It were all very well to revile me because I had grown prosperous and rich—for, if it seems not vain speaking on my part—I had succeeded beyond my fondest dreams. But for whom did I toil? Have I not told you? Was it not for Ruth and the children with whom we had been blessed?

"Those were my unregenerate days. I felt it were as wise to reason with the wind as with a woman. But still, although I did not tell Ruth, her words had set me thinking. Many a time, when the toils of the day were over, and I sat even as you found me in this evening hour, I asked myself these questions: Was it robbery? Was I worshiping a golden image? Had I paid too much for the things I enjoyed by bartering for them my good name, my self-respect, and the esteem of my friends? Then, I would brace myself, and try to convince myself that all was well. Instead of troubling my head with foolish doubts engendered by a woman's scruples, I ought to be shrewder and more business-like.

" 'You are getting foolish and weak,' I said to myself. 'Why not feather your nest while you can? All other taxgatherers do. If you are sharp enough to extort a goodly sum from some grasping, avaricious seller of spices, your cleverness should yield some fruit for

yourself.' And yet, despite all such specious arguments, I would lie on my couch through sleepless hours knowing full well that Ruth was right.

"Still, why should I care? I had got on. I was a self-made man. Who had helped me? Myself. And if I had helped myself—as many a traveler had bitterly remarked after passing the toll at Jericho—was that a matter for remorse? I might be hated and reviled, but still that was only part of the price one in my position must pay. Thus I silenced my better self.

"A customs house is more than a place for making money and receiving dues. The gossip and news that there reached me often relieved the tedium of the day. It so happened that tidings came to me of a certain Prophet who had arisen. I confess that my interests then lay in profits rather than prophets, but this Man was different. And, to my astonishment, although I could hardly believe it, I also learned that my former friend, Levi, had left his lucrative post in Capernaum to become a disciple of this Jesus of Nazareth. But what appealed to me about him was this. They said that he had thrust aside the authority and commands of Moses, setting up a code of new laws. Perhaps, therefore, he would not be too severe on the practices of even a man like myself. I was all eagerness to know more about him. Imagine my delight, therefore, when I heard, one evening, that he was actually making his way to Jericho. At all costs I must take the chance of seeing him for myself.

"But that was just the difficulty. There was sure to be a crowd, and I was little disposed to mingle with it. I had suffered the abuse and taunts of my neighbors too many times before not to know the scathing comments that would be freely made were I within earshot. For another thing, the possibility even of violence was not altogether absent from my mind. Looking back, I scarcely know what moved me to adopt the course I did. Going down toward the gate of the city, I climbed up into a tree. It has been said that that was because I am short of stature. That was only partly the reason. The truth is, I wished to see him without being seen. Until I knew more of the Prophet, I was not anxious to meet him. As for those who might laugh at Zacchaeus, the chief taxgatherer, being up a tree, let them laugh!

"It was with some satisfaction that I looked down on these who would have seized the opportunity of elbowing me aside had I been within reach. And a satisfaction with the way I had planned everything filled my breast. Only a few minutes had elapsed, when I caught sight of a company of people moving down the street from the main gate of the city. There was no little excitement. While a few called out jesting remarks to the Teacher as he approached, there were others who hailed him with eagerness. Some even began to bring sick people for him to heal, and children to be blessed. While, further, a number besought him to tell them of the kingdom he had come to found.

"I gazed at that calm figure, with a group of bronzed men about him. And then I stifled an exclamation of surprise. There was Levi! I recognized him. I could see that he was talking earnestly to Jesus, while a finger pointed to the customs house across the way. Was he telling him about me, the chief collector of Jericho? I was angry. There was no honor even among thieves! Then as they drew nigh, notwithstanding my precautions, Levi caught sight of me in the branches. How he did so, I cannot say; he may have inquired where I could be found. The Master stopped at the foot of the tree, and looking up said, 'Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.'

"I would not burden you with the thoughts which ran through my mind at that instant. It was as though one had flung open the prison doors to a fettered captive, who for long years had been pent up in some noisome dungeon. I was suddenly conscious that the shutters of my soul were thrown wide. The sweet air and sunlight of another world filled my being. While I made haste to obey the Master's summons, these feelings surged within me. I was as one that dreamed as to my house we wended our way.

"I cannot remember what Jesus conversed about as we walked along. My mind was busy with other things. Who would have thought that such an honor were to be accorded to one so unworthy? And that was being asked by others also. I saw sullen looks on their faces, their disappointment in him mingling with disgust for

me. I could not help hearing their comments; it was intended that I should hear them. They were indignant that Jesus should be the guest of a man that was a sinner! But I was relieved to find that Levi could not have informed the Master of my misdeeds; otherwise, he would scarcely have deigned to enter my door. Yet what would Ruth say? Would she welcome One who was known to be a Teacher of righteousness, and One with whom I had so little in common? Would she tell him the truth about me? Would she openly denounce my dishonesty before him?

"My mind was speedily set at ease. With that sweet smile I used so greatly to admire, but which for too long had been banished from her gentle face, she bade him enter. With her own fair hands, she unloosed his sandals—I noticed how worn they were—and poured forth water so that the grit and dust of the way might be cleansed therefrom. It would have been more seemly, I thought, and more in keeping with our station, had she summoned our menials to render this service to him. But that is a woman's way. Then to the meal that willing hands had prepared, she presently summoned us.

"It struck me that Levi, with whom I had merely exchanged greetings, looked ill at ease, as though he wondered what the upshot of this strange meeting would be. But compared with the accusing voices within, the memories of my cheating, lying, and greed, that mattered nothing. As I saw Jesus at my board with

his friends about him, as I listened to his gracious words of thanks to Ruth, and his talk of the happenings of the day, his eyes now sparkling with humor or veiled with sadness as recollections less pleasant arose, I gazed on him in silent wonderment. Nay, it was reverent awe. Who was he? Why did his glance seem to penetrate my soul, and why did all my life appear so hateful and contemptible?

"What sudden impulse moved me at that instant I know not. As I rose unsteadily to my feet, my heart was pounding within my breast. The faces of my guests turned to me with surprise written large upon them. They must have thought me crazed, so unceremonious and unbecoming my outburst as I discourteously broke in on their conversation. But I could not help myself. 'Behold, Lord,' I blurted out, 'the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.'

"My voice quavered with emotion. I dared not look at the Master. But instinctively I knew that he was not condemning my baseness unduly. He was glad that I had turned from it to the nobler way. That I desired to do above all else. By making a renunciation of half of what I had acquired, I sought to prove my penitence and detestation of my wrongdoing. But that was easier than acknowledging before others that I was no better than a common thief. And all who heard me that night perceived that that was how I rated myself.

"You may know that, according to our Law, when one has inadvertently wronged another, he is required to repay the sum, with one-fifth added thereto. In the case of a convicted thief, four times the full sum must be paid. And in that pure gaze stood all my sins remembered, and all my guilt lay bare. Jesus knew what it had cost me publicly to avow my shame. He must have done so. A heart so good and so sensitive, would understand as none other could. He turned those piercing eyes upon me again. I was now constrained to look him in the face. A smile of supreme satisfaction irradiated his countenance as he said, 'This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.'

"I could scarcely believe my ears. Why should he dignify me with the term, 'A son of Abraham'? While it was meant to encourage one, yet it humbled one to the dust. But when he said that his purpose was to save the lost, and that even the most perverse were not beyond his succor, my heart beat high with hope. Gladly I felt he had not failed; the lost had been found, yea, what I had bartered away, even my birthright, had been restored to me.

"To relieve the tension, as I thought at first, the Master then told one of those matchless stories which all men loved. It was of a nobleman who intrusted a pound to each of his ten servants. Some of them used his bounty and their ability to good purpose. Only

one was found unfaithful, having kept his pound laid away in a napkin rather than trading with it. As the Master finished the parable, I knew that he had been speaking to me as well as to the rest. But I know what you are thinking. You are asking, 'Why, if this man thus found the Lord of life, did he not forsake all, as did Levi, and follow him?'

"Truly, that was both my impulse and the thing for which I longed, I could have asked for no greater favor. Yea, I would have embraced any sacrifice to share his divine companionship. Yet I saw that the Master had imposed on me another task, equally onerous if less to be preferred. It was, to abide here in the place where my nefarious life had been a stumbling block to many, and here, in the trying sphere of daily duty and of ordinary business, to live out my new-found faith. Still more, it was to live down my shame, and live up to the standards of honest industry and fair dealing that he enjoined. There is a fuller reason why this was required of me. He whom I first regarded as a mighty prophet, has been revealed to me in fuller measure. That very day he left my house, he went up to Jerusalem. He never came back. They led him out to Golgotha, where they nailed him to a cross. He had indeed, as he said to me, come to seek and to save that which was lost.

"Thus, in grateful devotion, have I sought to live unto his glory. I cannot tell if I have wholly succeeded. It has been hard, and many indeed the jesting words

and the stinging taunts I have had to bear. They have cut me to the soul like whips of steel. And yet, it seems to me, no man can live his life in vain. His example, his influence, as well as the countless opportunities of doing some service for his fellows, abide in their effects long after life itself has ended. Thus do I counsel all men everywhere not to lose sight of the eternal riches. Thus would I point them to the pure delight and deep contentment of spirit that come to those who will, as the sacred Prophet says, 'Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.'

"The story of Zacchaeus, once the avaricious, but now the aspiring, is ended."

## VIII

## THE STORY OF THE IMPOTENT MAN OF BETHESDA

AS we walked down the narrow, sun-baked streets of Jerusalem, we found ourselves in the craftsmen's quarter. Beneath faded and tattered awnings were the shops of the potters, the smiths, the makers of harness for the beasts of the caravan, and the workers in brass. But we wanted none of these. We were in search of a certain man who was a carpenter. At last, guided by the sound of the saw, we discovered him busy at his bench.

"Greetings, Joshua," we began. "How fare you today?"

He laid down his saw and, straightening his back as though weary, returned our salutations warmly. The preliminaries disposed of, he inquired what he could do for us, and without more ado we told him why we had come in quest of him.

"You once met with Jesus of Nazareth," we said, "Will you, out of the goodness of your heart, favor us with the story of that day and its happenings?"

"Assuredly," he replied, "and right gladly. But doubtless you are tired with the heat. Sit here."

He brushed the shavings from a log and, leaning against the bench, began.

"You are surprised to find me here, hale and hearty, and engaged in laborious toil? I read it in your glance as you entered."

"It is even so," we answered. "We had been led to believe that for long years you were afflicted, and even though the Master had compassion on you—"

His laughter left the sentence uncompleted.

"You were right, but, my friend, I have discovered the joy of honest work. To think how poor life was, and how much I have missed! But that is not what you want to hear. I will commence at the beginning."

We settled ourselves as comfortably as the unyielding log would permit, and waited for his story with avid interest.

"First of all, the days of my youth were made weary by recurring sickness. My good father did all in his power to secure for me the priceless boon of health. He was but a craftsman, however, working in this same shop where you found me. And he impoverished himself on my behalf. One after another skilled in the art of healing, did he bring to my side. All their remedies and their efforts were unavailing. So it seemed as though I were doomed to a life of continued misery and suffering. Then some of our neighbors urged my father to bear me to the pool called Bethesda. This was held in high repute by certain of our people.

It stands near the sheep gate which is, as you perhaps know, at the north of the Temple area.

"Many resorted thither, for it was commonly reported that an angel troubled the waters at given intervals. And the tradition ran that he who stepped in first, after the angel's touch, would be cured. Accordingly, although my father had little faith in the story, he carried me there, laying me in the most advantageous position he could find. Still that amounted to little. As I have said, many, afflicted with divers diseases, were there. Some had waited for weary months, even years, in the hope of being cured. A few were still sanguine; most had become embittered by repeated disappointments. Yet I soon learned that there were compensations. Pilgrims coming from afar, and others returning from the Temple, were stirred to pity by the sight of these people in such an unhappy plight. And with the object of securing some blessing, or in gratitude for the good bestowed, these pious folk gave us freely of their bounty.

"As the days passed, I confess that I found myself more resigned to my fate than I had ever been before. The money thus obtained procured for me many a little luxury to which I had hitherto been stranger. Moreover, as one after another was cured and went away, I was able to gain a better position. I do not mean better as being nearer to the steps of the pool, but where I was among the first to catch the notice of pilgrims passing through the gate. This brought me

a large increase in the amount of alms, and I found, not without some inner misgiving, that I was now much more concerned about these returns than about recovery. I had become a professional mendicant! My affliction and the piteous look I was able to assume, together with a certain whining voice I had acquired, were my stock-in-trade. While my companions and I cumbering the gate still retained some belief in the miraculous powers of the pool, I fear that our chief interest now centered upon the money which our piteous appeals brought forth.

"As I have already said, I was therefore, resigned to my condition. Yet, more, as I looked at the care-lined faces of the merchants who came and went, or watched those who toiled, carrying their heavy loads along the street in the blazing heat of the sun while I was seated in the shade of the wall, I began to thank the Powers that I had escaped a lot so arduous. When my father remonstrated with me, as he did—for as an honest craftsman it was horrible to him to see his son consorting with common beggars—I bade him begone. What had life to offer me? It were surely better to be an object of public sympathy, and to be well paid for it, than to lie at home, a drag upon my parents' industry. And so, bitter as life was, it had some recompense to offer.

"It had, until— But this is what you want to know. Through that same gate of which I have spoken, mingling with the jostling crowd of passers-by—pil-

grims, traders, men of business, and human beasts of burden—came Jesus of Nazareth. I had already heard of him, for he had created a great stir in the capital by reason of his wondrous words, and also his compassion for the afflicted. Yet, I had not seen him before, nor did I even know it was he to whom I stretched out my hand for alms. Yet as I did so, I felt instinctively that this was no ordinary pilgrim coming to the city. There was a dignity of bearing to which his peasant robes seemed ill suited. But more, there was a kindliness in his face as he stopped, regarding me earnestly. It may have been merely my fancy, but I had the feeling that he was looking right into my very heart, reading there the record of a forfeited manhood.

"He spoke, and as he did so something awakened in my soul. It seemed to me almost the same as when, at the touch of the angel, the waters of the pool bubbled and boiled. He asked me how long I had been stricken with this infirmity. I replied, 'Thirty and eight years.' He looked at me with his discerning eyes, and a light irradiated his face as though he had fully probed the actual reason for my being there. Then he asked, 'Wilt thou be made whole?' I did not intend to lower my defenses, nor to have my means of livelihood snatched away from me by an idle question. I replied instantly, and, I fear, not without a flash of anger, 'Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool, but while I am coming another steppeth down before me.'

"Even while I spoke, I knew that was only an excuse. Nor is that all: I was sure that he knew it also. By some strange chance it flitted across my mind at that very instant that I, in common with people around me, had limited the possible blessing through sheer lack of faith. This was a curative spring. It certainly possessed beneficial qualities. But just as certainly its benefits might have been enjoyed by all who made the effort to immerse themselves in the waters. Those benefits were not confined merely to the first one who made the venture of faith. But that is by the way. I am turning aside from my story.

"As I looked up at him, still with some measure of insolence, I noticed that a look almost of sternness sat enthroned there. He had detected my insincerity, and saw that my futile excuse was meant to cover my acquiescence in my lot. More, that I greatly preferred a life of remunerative, if enforced, idleness, rather than assume the obligations of health and robust manhood. Jesus stretched out his hand commandingly, saying unto me, 'Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.'

"My first impulse was to sneer defiantly, and bid him not to jest at the affliction of a poor sufferer. But, almost in spite of myself, I was compelled to obey. Like the sudden gleaming of the lightning's scimitar, cleaving the dark curtains of night, I saw a vision, the like of which these eyes had never beheld up to that hour. I saw myself, Joshua the mendicant, taking what fortune might fling into my lap, or cursing any who

passed by unmoved by my doleful appeals, now no longer a cripple, no longer a parasite, but a man! A swift accession of strength came to me, and obeying his word, I leaped to my feet. I could have laughed outright at the astonished faces around about me. I could have struck the pompous figure of a merchant who had frequently declined my pleas for money, as he nodded his head as much as to say, 'It is even as I thought—an impostor.' But my mind was dominated by the picture I had seen. Henceforth, I was to be a man, filling a man's place, and making the days rich with honorable labor.

"As you will understand, I was so excited by these new sensations that immediately I left the place both of my bondage and my shame. My feet and legs, unaccustomed to bear my weight, caused me at first to stagger like a drunken man, but I made my way as quickly as I could toward the Temple. I felt strangely prompted first to offer my gratitude to Jehovah. Only after I had done this did I remember that I had uttered no word of thanks to my unknown benefactor. I retraced my steps to the pool, hoping to find him still in the cloisters, but it was in vain.

"But I must tell you this. All days had become much alike to me. They were distinguished only by whether returns were good or bad. I had completely forgotten that it was the Sabbath. As I hunted for the Master, I walked again toward the Temple. There I was stopped by some of the elders. 'It is the Sabbath day,'

said one, pointing to the padded rug upon which I had lain so long. 'It is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.' I was wrathful at such petty quibbling, considering the cure that had been wrought, and I said indignantly, 'He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk.'

"But they were plainly not to be silenced so easily. Another turned upon me demanding, 'What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk?' I stared at them abashed. I knew not what to answer. It came to me then, only for the first time, that I did not even know the name of him to whom I owed so much. It was possibly a foolish and irreverent thing for me to do, but angrily I flung the rug at their feet, and went my way.

"There was a great multitude in the Temple courts, and I was soon lost in the crowd. But so was he whom I sought. I felt that I could not leave the precincts of the sanctuary until I had voiced my thankfulness to him. Then, after a time, although I had looked for him in vain, he found me. Surrounded by a group of people, and talking earnestly with them, he saw me. He left the charmed circle. I began to pour forth my gratitude, as I fell upon my knees. But taking me firmly by the arm, he lifted me up and said, 'Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.'

"It seemed a hard saying, but not harder than I merited. It was true, then! He knew me for a man full of hypocrisy—one who had gone aside from seek-

ing deliverance in order to live upon the honest efforts of others. My sin had been unbelief.

"My parents were now dead. I had no home, no friends but the beggars with whom I had consorted. But the next day I came to the shop of the carpenter where my father had labored so long. I saw there the deserted bench. And all about me was the joyous hum of men, industrious and God-fearing, who found daily happiness in the labor of their hands. This is not recorded by those who set down the story of our Lord's life, for it was a matter between myself and him. At any rate, it could not be of interest to the world at large. But before another day had passed, I again went to him. I told him that I wanted to be the man he would desire, and that I would work for my bread if I only knew how. I acquainted him with my story, and that my father had acquired the name of an honest worker of wood. And to my surprise, Jesus said that he also had toiled in a carpenter's shop. Therefore it was he who, with his own hands, taught me how to handle the plane and saw. It was he who set my feet in the path in which a man may live not only by his own exertions, but also to the glory of God, even though his tasks be commonplace.

"It was only after many days, when he again returned to Jerusalem, that I heard the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. And then I discovered that he was indeed the Christ of God. I had no gifts to offer him. I had no wealth to lay at his feet. My

days were too full, battling for bread, to render him any service. But I gave him what, perchance, is the gift he desires most. By that I mean, the love and devotion of a man who realizes his indebtedness to the divine Lord, and who would express his love, not in high-sounding words, but in the daily doing of his will. And if, as I have since learned, he magnified the name of God in all he wrought in the workshop of Nazareth, then at least my service shall be so inspired, and dedicated to an aim so great."

As we walked homeward, we could not help feeling that not only had this onetime mendicant discovered life's meaning, but also he had laid bare this significant truth impinging with irresistible force upon our mind. We had scarcely grasped it before. The life acceptable to the Almighty is not one spent idly waiting for some hoped-for blessing. It is one of faith which goes on its way trustfully, but which also works toward the realization of the heart's desire. It is not in mute and ignoble acquiescence in circumstances, but rather in obedience to the promptings of his Spirit. It is not even in pious resignation, but in utilizing spiritual forces about us that we please him. Nor is it in following minutely the demands of religious ritual, but, instead, seeking to do our daily duty with the divine approval upon us that we glorify his name. The common service of the day, in the place of business or the home, is thus a means by which the faith within us finds

expression. And the service we render to one another, for love's sweet sake, becomes a sacrament unto God. As we drew near to our dwelling we found ourselves humming:

"O Master, let me walk with thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.

"Teach me thy patience; still with thee
In closer, dearer company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
In trust that triumphs over wrong."

## IX

## THE STORY OF SALOME, THE WIFE OF ZEBEDEE

"THERE is little I can tell, still less what I would wish to have others know," she said. "I cannot look back on those days without a feeling of regret, yea, almost of shame."

We had gone to her with the object of inviting her confidence, and we were somewhat taken aback by her evident unwillingness to speak of what she knew.

"You are unduly sensitive," we remonstrated. "You have nothing with which to reproach yourself."

"Nothing?" she echoed. "Do you not regard me as presumptuous above measure in seeking places of preferment for my sons in the Master's kingdom?"

"Others may," we countered, "but that is because of their slender knowledge of you. We would justify you in their eyes."

"Nay, I ask it not. I was wrong in motive."

"Is it wrong for a mother to desire the best for her children," we persisted, "or with foresight to make their future certain? That cannot be. We, too, had a mother, and the hopes she cherished, the dreams she held dear, cannot be lightly esteemed. Come, Salome,

tell us what you know, and permit us to judge its worth for those who shall yet hear."

Our words were not without effect. She began to speak.

"While I allow what you have so generously said, it was ambition, not presumption, which lay behind my request. As you probably know, I am not only the wife of Zebedee, and the mother of James and John, but also the sister of Mary, the mother of our Lord. And that, perchance, more than anything else, prompted me to act as I did. But let me speak of things as they come to mind. Then you will the better understand what is on my heart.

"It was with mingled feelings that Zebedee and I learned that our two sons had become the devoted followers of Jesus. Naturally, in one way it was to us a source of great joy, for the Son of Mary had proved a pattern youth all through the days of her widowhood. But I should also say that Joseph had died, leaving Mary with a family for which to provide. And except the small carpentry shop at Nazareth, she had nothing. Jesus had been working under the guidance of Joseph, and so, when the necessity arose, he stepped into the place of the breadwinner.

"But later on, some impulse came upon him which mystified us exceedingly. He abandoned the common tasks of the day to his brothers, whom he had trained to handle the tools of their father. Then he closed the door of the shop for the last time, and went forth into

the world to take up the work of that brave soul, John the Baptist. We had only the gossip of a traveling merchant or two to go on, but strange and unbelievable stories reached our ears through them. Jesus had begun to preach. Moreover, there were some who said he exercised wondrous powers, the like of which man had never wielded before. Then, sure as we were that some strange thing had befallen him, to our surprise he came back home.

"His mother questioned him in vain. But, as it was the Sabbath, he readily agreed to accompany her to the synagogue. That day I shall never forget. The rabbi was accustomed to ask some of the young men to read from the sacred roll, for his sight was dim. And when his eyes fell upon Mary's Son, he beckoned Jesus to come forward. It may have been that he was applying some test. Perhaps he expected a refusal. But, obedient to the summons, Jesus stood up, and took the roll from the hand of the attendant. We sat, a hush upon the house, as he turned to the place he evidently desired above all others. And then, in clear and unfaltering tones, he commenced to read. It was from the prophecies of Isaiah. The words live in my heart to this hour. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that the bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'

"The words, I say, were familiar to us all, but never had they been given such meaning. And as he concluded, we looked at each other, and then at him, wondering what was about to happen."

"We are consumed with interest," we commented. "What did he say then?"

"This," answered Salome, "although I can convey but little of the astonishment that his words caused. 'This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.' I fear that he was shocked at the reception given to his declaration. A murmur of surprise, changing to horror and indignation, filled the house. The aged rabbi looked aghast. It seemed to him blasphemy of the basest kind. And while some wondered what evil spirit had seized upon the young man, there were others whose anger could not be restrained.

" 'Is not this Joseph's son?' they demanded. For knowing him as the neighbors did, they could not reconcile such daring with the quiet, inoffensive youth who had grown up amongst them. But they were not prepared for what was still to come. He looked at them, not wrathfully, but rather with deep understanding in his face, and raising his hand for silence—for a tumult had already been aroused—he said quietly, but so that all could hear, 'Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.' And he said, 'Verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you

of a truth many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land, but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Serepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian.'

"Then babel broke loose. They rushed toward him, hustling him out of the building. Mary was at the point of death, so grieved and mortified was she. I went to her aid, so I can but tell you what I heard afterward. They intended to throw him over the brow of the hill, but in the confusion he escaped unharmed.

"And now I come to my own part in this. One day, my two sons, James and John, returned home long before evening. Their father, Zebedee, was rather sharp of tongue, and was wont to chide them freely if they left the boat before the work was done. But before he could speak, James imparted to us the decision of John and himself. They were leaving the lake forever. Their father rose to his feet, ablaze with anger. I can see him now. With his finger pointing at them, he demanded the reason. Did he not give them a fair share of the returns from each catch? Had he not treated them with all consideration? John, the younger, replied that the father had been generous indeed, but that they were throwing in their lot with Jesus of Nazareth, whose mission they desired to share.

Then Zebedee was furious. He waved John aside, addressing the elder. In unmeasured terms, he accused him of ingratitude after all that had been done for him. Yea, he called him a hot-headed fool who, instead of holding back his brother from folly, had countenanced his waywardness and even encouraged him.

"I knew not what to do. Secretly I was proud of my boys. That they should have chosen one so high-souled and noble as their kinsman, Jesus, pleased me well, even as I told you. Others of the young fishers of the lake had caused many a sad heart with the wild companionships they had indulged. That is why I was glad that they were to be the intimates of the new Teacher. Yet would I not mislead you, for I felt also for Zebedee. He was advancing in years. He had labored hard to get the boats, and he had looked forward to the day when our sons would relieve him entirely. Now they were about to give up everything for what he conceived to be but an empty fancy. But nothing that we could say or do could alter the decision they had made.

"Month after month dragged on with only an occasional message from one quarter and another. The Master, as we now called him, had openly declared his mission. He had come to establish the kingdom of our nation. The hour could not long be delayed. I was sure of that. So widespread his fame, so great the power that he exercised over men, that the kingdom of God must be founded soon. And then it came to me,

as I lay awake one night, why should these sons of mine not profit to some just extent by the sacrifice both they and their parents had made?

"It was not that we alone had given our sons to the cause. Others had, doubtless, done the same thing. But as I turned the matter over in my mind, there were none that had left prospects of a substantial livelihood such as my sons had. Andrew and Peter were also from the lake, but they had only the one boat—two struggling fishers, while we— Yet that was not what weighed most with me. It was rather that, being related to Jesus through his mother, I felt we had prior claim upon him. And any places of preferment were surely merited by my sons. That is the reason that I went to the Master as I did. It was a toilsome journey to go far afield, but I felt that it would be amply repaid. To see my dear sons was something, for my heart yearned over them both. But to see them given the place of honor in the new kingdom before my eyes closed in death was worth any effort.

"I had laid my plans carefully. James and John were overjoyed to look upon me again, and as soon as I could, I told them the object of my visit. They were, however, reluctant to act for themselves as I suggested. James said it was neither wise nor fitting to thrust themselves to the fore like that. While John felt that the time was not opportune, nor should we seek to presume on the family ties that, slender though they were, bound the Master to us. I mocked at their

scruples, telling them that if they did not broach the matter unto the Master I would do so myself. This I did. Going boldly to him, I greeted him, and then asked permission to make a request of him.

"He looked at me steadfastly as though he would first read what was in my heart, and then he asked, 'What wilt thou?' I stretched out my hands to him. 'Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.'

" 'Ye know not what ye ask,' he said sadly. Then turning to my sons standing by, he asked, 'Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?'

"My heart gave a great leap of satisfaction as I listened to their reply. I felt that at least they were worthy of the pre-eminence I sought for them, 'We are able,' they answered.

"Then the Master said, 'Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.'

"The others were gathered around. And they heard what had been said. With one voice they expressed indignation that two of their number should seek to gain precedence in this way. It was not for me to make plain to them the grounds on which I had come. They would not admit that my sons had any prior claim over them. Nor would I demean myself by telling

them. Yet I was bitterly disappointed. It appeared to me neither right nor just—that is, as I viewed the situation then. Of course, all such hard feelings and bitterness have long ago passed from me, but I am speaking of what I felt in that hour.

"I stood for a moment, stunned, and therefore could not take in what the Master was saying. But dimly I heard him trying to correct the views of them all about his kingdom, and say, 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

"Those words haunted me. I began to ask myself what they implied. I besought Mary to tell me of those things deep hidden in her heart, although she would not. Then there came back to me that scene in the synagogue of which I spoke, and what followed therefrom. What did he mean by saying, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears'? Then like yonder mountains that are sometimes obscured by the mists, and later stand revealed as the vapors lift before the rising sun, the truth appeared to me. Without asking my two sons directly, I sought to know their minds concerning Jesus. And the more I pondered it all, the surer I was that this was no ordinary man, nor was the kingdom of which he spoke merely the founding anew of David's throne. And still—still—I could not bring myself fully to admit that which seemed borne in upon me. It was too vast for my mind to grasp. But there

were other matters which claimed my attention, driving all such questions aside.

"As you have gathered, the elders, angered by the upright, blameless life of Jesus, making their own the blacker by contrast, sought his death. And before that week was ended, they had bribed or forced the Romans to do their bidding. He was taken out beyond the gate, and there crucified. Mary, my sister, had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, as was her custom. She was lodged with me in the house of some friends. And there came the tidings that Jesus had been condemned. While she was filled with agonized concern, I was also anxious about my two sons. So together we hastened to Golgotha. Yet ask me not of that. It were too horrible. All I could do was to comfort and sustain her as I might, for she would not leave the hill while he still lived. As the end drew near, unmindful of the jeering crowd, she insisted on going up to the cross itself. He recognized her. And as John, my son, joined us there, fearing that some harm might befall us, Jesus commended his mother to the keeping of my son. Then came the moment when the tragedy was concluded. With a supreme effort, Jesus lifted his eyes to the heavens, saying, 'It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

"The other women and I, with John, at length prevailed on Mary to return to our lodging. And through the next day, which was the Sabbath, we never left her side. Going to the sepulcher next morning, you know

now what was found. The tomb was empty; the Lord had arisen.

"All that had been so dark and puzzling now became clear, clear as the morning sun which broke through the trees of Joseph's garden, and shone into the empty sepulcher. As I spake to Mary of the beliefs which now gripped my heart, she confirmed with her own tongue the truth of them. This Son of hers was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, for whom we had waited so long, but whom our dim eyes had not perceived. Her lips had been sealed by some inner compulsion, as well as by the unbelief and complaints of her family. Yet she had never ceased to cherish the hope that, one day, he would stand revealed—no longer the carpenter's son, but the Saviour of the world. As I listened, you can imagine my self-reproach and shame. That I had thus gone to him, urging the rights of my sons or seeking favors for them was almost more than I could endure."

She paused, overcome by her unpent tears. We ventured to remark, "We can well feel for you, O mother, and your mistake—if such it were—is covered by that word."

There was a look of interrogation in her face as she raised her head.

"Except for the love of God himself, there is no affection like that of a true mother," we continued. "She it is who ever desires and strives for the best of blessings for her offspring. It is not to be wondered

at that you should seek the place of honor for your sons. Even though it were not the earthly kingdom which you set your heart upon, you meant well. Even though your request was not granted in the way that then seemed good, yet your James, the first courageous martyr, who died beneath Herod's sword, your John, the beloved, who lived in exile, proved themselves worthy of the Saviour's confidence."

She smiled through her tears.

"Yea," she responded. "You speak truly. They were indeed worthy. Would that we all might prove as true to the Christ as did they. And will the Lord himself be less true to them—to us?"

## X

## THE STORY OF THE MAN BORN BLIND

"ASK me not concerning Jesus, the Christ," he answered.

We looked at him with astonishment for we had found him only after a long walk through the tortuous and narrow streets of Jerusalem. And it was the first time we had been rebuffed.

"Why not, pray? Are you not he who was born blind?" we persisted. "Did not Christ give you the priceless gift of sight?"

He regarded us with a whimsical smile, and at once we knew we had judged him hastily.

"Truly did he. That is why I said do not ask me about him. My reason? Because no tongue can utter, no words convey a thousandth part of the gratitude that swells within my bosom. And I would do myself a wrong were I to attempt that which is beyond the powers of man."

It was with some relief that we listened. And then we said, "Friend, you are right. Yet for the sake of those who love the Lord and would love him more, try even the impossible and tell us of your experience of his grace."

"Well, the world into which I came was enshrouded

with gloom. Now that I can see I begin to realize what I had missed. No radiant east in saffron robes proclaimed the coming day. No golden splendor of the west glowed as the sun set. No diamond-mantled skies overspread my couch at night. The birds that chirp upon the boughs, yonder solemn hills clothed with majesty, the flower-decked valleys stretching there far beyond the walls—of these I had heard from my companions, but to me they were but empty words. And now—

"My parents were poor, and too long had I been a burden to them. So I had to take the only course then open to men like me: I sat to beg the charity of passers-by. My days had been tedious but for a way I devised of snatching some little interest from the people who sometimes spoke to me. I learned to know the voice and what it revealed of the inner man. Ah! you never guessed that the soul is laid bare even by the tone? That is how I cheated the hours of their grievous weight. One day a group of strangers paused near where I sat. At once I placed them by their speech as from the north country. Beyond Samaria, it must be Galilee. And as I mused over this, I was greatly surprised, because they spoke of my affliction.

" 'Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Immediately I knew who they were. The word 'Master' would have told me that, even had I not located the place whence they came. For my friends and I had heard much of Jesus. We

knew him to be a prophet, mighty in deed. Yea, some had further said that he could also remove human misery. But my mind hung upon their words. It was an old question—that problem of suffering. Many a time had I demanded of myself why Jehovah should permit some to be so blessed with riches and all the heart can wish, while others were denied even the ordinary faculties which men esteem so lightly until they have them not. But, although I had never found any satisfactory explanation, I had never heard anyone ascribe affliction or pain to the sin of a man before he was born. What folly the wise can utter! But I found myself waiting, listening intently for the Master's reply. And I declare that never had I heard a voice that moved my inmost soul as did his. Then he replied, 'Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me.'

"Suddenly, I sprang to my feet and flung myself prostrate before him. Imploring his mercy and help, I remember how I turned my sightless eyes upon him, stretching out my arms in entreaty. Would he be moved by the cry of a forlorn beggar? The favors of the great were freely bestowed only upon those who could make some adequate recompense. And I—naught could I offer by way of bribe, inducement, or reward. Thus it flashed across my darkened mind how vain and futile such a plea as mine.

"But even while I thus reasoned, I felt his hands

pressing moist clay gently upon my eyelids. Then came the commanding word, 'Go wash in the pool of Siloam.' Without a word, unquestioning the sincerity of his implied promise, I began to thread my way through the streets. That was indeed a test both of patience and faith—patience, for you, to whom eyes are not as precious as the costliest gems that ever merchant found, cannot know how hard is the path of the sightless; and my faith also was tried, for, evil though I know now those thoughts to be, as I wandered on, doubts arose in my mind like the fever-laden vapors of the swamp. What could it mean? Was it only a pretense? Perhaps it was to rid himself of my importunity, and while I pursued some foolish quest, I was losing what little gain might otherwise be mine.

"Then my heart rose in revolt against such unworthy thoughts. Had I trained myself to read the soul in a man's voice in vain? I knew that Jesus would not, yea could not, mock one in such a plight. And thus to Siloam's waters I came. As I stood by the edge and laved my eyes, lo! it was as though the curtains of night had been suddenly torn aside. There lay the pool like a silver mirror, the blue sky above my head, and people leisurely passing along the highway beyond. It was all so unbelievable, so wonderful! I now stumbled on my way to the synagogue. My brain was set on fire. Two things I must do. First I must render thanks to the Almighty Benefactor of the race for the mercy that was mine. Then I must search out

him to whom I owed so much. Even though none might tell me where he was, though I did not know his face, I had but to hear once more that soul-compelling voice to find my Master and Lord.

"Hard by the Temple, whom should I encounter but some of our neighbors. They recognized me. And one could not but be amused at their surprise. 'Is not this he that sat and begged?' asked one. 'This is he,' replied some. While others, unconvinced as they might well be, remarked, 'He is like him.' I decided it for them, however, by saying, 'I am he!' You ought to have seen the wonder with which they gazed upon me, as though doubting their very senses. They could not credit it, but verily I could scarcely do so myself. At once they assailed me with eager questions. 'How were thine eyes opened?' All I could tell them was the bare facts. 'A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash; and I went and washed, and I received sight.' They evidently knew Jesus, certainly better than I, for they demanded excitedly, 'Where is he?' Probably it was the first time his miraculous power had come so closely to them. But I could not tell them where he was. I had never seen him.

"The matter, however, was not to end there. Whether it was to prove that the people's estimate of Jesus were correct and the rulers' wrong, I cannot say. Possibly they wanted to give proof of their faith to those who had maligned him. But they led me to the

Pharisees in triumph. One thing had, I think, escaped them. It was the Sabbath day, and this work of healing had been performed thereon! The elders stared at me as my friends spoke, and then one of them inquired curtly how my sight had been given to me. I am sure they would have branded me as a cheat—one who had made pretense of being blind—had not these men spoken so vehemently. In very truth, I was beginning to feel wrathful at their unbelief, and so I answered, 'He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.'

"They were in a difficulty. They could not deny the testimony of those about me, nor could they doubt that my infirmity had been removed. Therefore, unable to dispute the fact, they sought to discredit Jesus and poison the minds of the people against him. 'This man is not of God,' they said, authoritatively, 'because he keepeth not the Sabbath day.' But, oddly enough, another of their number asked, 'How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?' To cover their confusion, he who had spoken first demanded, 'What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?' And I replied, 'He is a prophet.'

"The news had spread quickly. My parents had come to the synagogue to worship as was their custom, and word had reached them. They came up at this moment, thrusting the neighbors aside to greet me. And at once the elders questioned them. 'Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?'

My father spoke up. 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.' I understood why he evaded the responsibility of a direct answer. The elders had already threatened that if any man acknowledged Jesus as the Christ he should be expelled from the synagogue.

"They confronted me once more. 'Give God the praise,' they said, piously. 'We know that this man is a sinner.' But by this time I was thoroughly angry, for I had perceived their crafty purpose, and I did not care what might happen to me. 'Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see!' But they were still unwilling to admit defeat before the people, and they asked me again, 'What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?' And now, blazing with indignation at their unscrupulous ways, I cried, 'I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?'

"Savagely they reviled me. 'Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.' It was my turn to be bitter now, and I said, 'Why, herein is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God, and doeth his

will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.'

"It would have done your heart good to have noted their helplessness in view of the facts. 'Thou wast altogether born in sins,' they cried, 'and dost thou teach us?' And they hustled me down the steps to the crowded street. But what cared I? I was no longer a blind beggar, no longer a pitiful mendicant, but a man! I could see!

"Two things were clear in my mind. I must not involve my aged parents any further, for the Jews would avenge their discomfiture upon them. Moreover, I had still to find my Benefactor to express my gratitude to him. But he it was who found me. He had heard of the controversy, and that I had been cast out of the synagogue by the elders. He was all solicitude. He knew from personal experience what their enmity might mean, for I would be handicapped enough having to gain a new means of livelihood without having them set men's hands against me. Yet did I not construe his purpose when he asked, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' All I could blurt out was, 'Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?' I was sorely perplexed by the happenings of the day, and I could not think clearly. That is why I said that. Then as though he had resolved to commit some weighty secret to my

keeping, he said, 'Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.'

"What could I do? Like that moment when the darkness fled from my eyes beside the pool, I saw at once what it all meant, Why should the elders have vowed to punish any who affirmed this to be the Christ if they were not half-convinced of it themselves? Why were they so anxious to discredit his miraculous powers if that were not so? And now, impelled by the truth I saw, I bowed before him, saying, 'Lord, I believe!' He laid his hand in blessing on my head. Then he said, 'For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.'

"Often have I turned those words over in my mind. What could they mean? Was it that those who followed the light they had, and used the part-knowledge vouchsafed to them, should have fuller truth revealed; and that those who boasted they were enlightened, but did not live up to what they enjoyed, should have the light withdrawn? Yea, I am sure it were so. Use or lose is ever the law of life. And because I had not become embittered by mine affliction, nor reviled the Almighty for having dealt hardly with me, but awaited the outworking of his will, because I had inwardly received what Jesus had given to me, I passed from faith in him as a prophet to acknowledge him the Prince of David's house and of Jehovah's promise. This is the Christ of God.

"Now you understand why, at the outset, I bade you not ask me concerning him. My love to Jesus is like unto the waters of Jordan, fed by the melting snows of Hermon, swift, turbulent, yet revivifying. And yet, though I put it so, the figure is but a poor one. I cannot tell you what he has done for my soul. Only the divine Son of God could have taken the darkness from my eyes; only he could have satisfied the longings of my heart. And from that distant day to this hour I have grown more fully thankful that to me was the promise of our ancient prophet Isaiah, fulfilled: 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.' Yea, a living faith in Christ is, as I have said, like our noble river. But a superficial pretense of religion may best be likened to yonder Dead Sea. It receives all to itself; it gives forth nothing. It takes the bounty of God; it turns naught to account. Therefore it is dead. For in that sea no fish cleave the waters. No luscious vegetation clothes its shores. No bird will even wing its way across its sullen expanse. Rightly is it called dead. But is not the hollow profession of religion also dead and profitless? Tell me, do I not speak true? And what, therefore, shall our own faith be likened to? To see, as this world reckons wisdom, is to be blind. But to be responsive to the touch of Christ, to obey his bidding, is, verily, to see indeed!"

## XI

## THE STORY OF THE TWO SISTERS OF BETHANY

THE home at Bethany glistened white beneath the sun's hot rays. But within the courtyard were deep velvet shadows, and inside the house a coolness and a calm that were welcome indeed after the dust of the highway. We were expected, and the cordial reception accorded to us by the two sisters was almost sufficient recompense in itself. Martha, the elder, was taller than her sister, and created the impression of a strong, capable nature. But Mary was in marked contrast in almost every way. Slight in build, there was something almost ethereal in her face. Her brow revealed a meditative disposition, which was emphasized by the gray eyes and sensitive mouth. Further opportunity of studying them both was, however, impossible at that moment, for Martha, bidding us to be seated, plunged at once into the topic of conversation.

"You wish to learn what we know of the Master?" she asked. "You are thrice welcome, as indeed are all lovers of the Lord. But you must not take it ill if we seem—Mary and I—unduly exalted by the privileges that were ours. For truly, I may say, there was no place where Jesus so loved to be, or resorted so often,

except it was his Father's house. It is not, as you can see, that we have much of which to boast. This house is plain and unpretentious to a degree, but it has that which ever turns a house into a home."

She looked with appraising eye about the room as she spoke.

"And what is that, pray, which works a change so much to be desired?" we inquired.

"What makes a home? Love—mutual understanding, sympathy, and good will. And these, like the luscious fruit of the vineyard, were ours in abundance. But it is not of that I would speak. Jesus, you know, Lord of heaven though he be, was but a wanderer. Yea, homeless was he as the poorest beggar in the streets. His family had cast him out from Nazareth. Perhaps it was not wholly the fault of his brethren, for the elders of the people were so incensed against him that they brought pressure to bear upon his kinsfolk. And rather than make them suffer, or have them turned out from the city, he went. For a time he lodged in Capernaum, from whence he moved out to carry on his gracious ministry. But as the sphere of his work was enlarged, even the small comforts of Capernaum were denied him, and many a time he slept with no roof but the lowering skies. Mind, he spoke not of that. It was from certain of his disciples that I gleaned it. And why did they not seek some temporary shelter, do you ask? Because their resources were frequently exhausted, and they had no choice.

"Scarcely did we realize that before," we remarked. "It seems beyond belief that the Son of God should know such straitened ways."

"But many stranger things marked his life also, if you will but consider it. Yet as I was saying, when his way led toward Jerusalem, he would gladly make this house his dwelling. Happy beyond words were we when those days came. Perchance, had we known fully then what we know now the radiance of the privilege might have blinded us by its light. We might have been overwhelmed, awed, by his presence. As it was, we knew him first as a superb Teacher of righteousness. His words were so different from all to whom we had listened before. He seemed to know just what one needed. Were anxiety, dread, foreboding our portion? He lifted one's feet from the marshlands where they sank, and placed them on solid rock. Was it a feeling of life's littleness, its meaningless tasks and petty duties? He bore one on wings of aspiration to the high tablelands where the view was limitless. Yea, wondrous was he! What little we could do for him to relieve life's toilsome way was repaid a thousandfold. A radiating center of joy, of mirth, of happiness, Jesus transformed the home the moment he entered it. For our hearts were shadowed by the ill health of our brother. And many a time Mary and I would be sad indeed because of his pain and weakness.

"But, apart from that, it seemed to us that the Master found here what he longed for—sympathy and un-

derstanding. It must have meant something to pass from the critical and faultfinding rulers in the city to an atmosphere where love reigned. And I know he felt it. While he seldom spoke of the cruel and unfair treatment he received at their hands, I knew. So did Mary. Call it intuition or instinct as you will. We would note the look of utter weariness, yea, even pain upon his countenance as he would come in from a long day of contact with the city. Yet it was not the effort of teaching, though he gave of his soul strength to that, nor was it his miracles of healing, though the outflow of his love was thus costly. It was the carping, the ridicule, the stubborn unbelief of the elders, which cut deeply. But seated there, where you are reclining now, peace would adorn his brow like a halo of light, and his genial good humor and considerateness for us would issue forth."

Martha was so immersed in her memories of those days that we feared the time would pass before we could reach the point we desired. Therefore, breaking in on her reminiscences, we asked her about the incidents which the Evangelists record.

"Forgive us," we said, "but would it be deemed impertinent to ask concerning one memorable visit that Jesus made here?"

Martha smiled. She knew to what we referred. "Is it when I so foolishly became annoyed that evening with Mary? That is not kind to one so foolish. But, stay; I have spoken much. Mary shall tell you."

We turned to the sister who had sat, listening to Martha's story without a word. Now, however, in quiet and measured tones, she took up the narrative.

"Martha did not mean that," she said. "It was not foolishness on her part. It was rather her goodness of soul. She saw how our Master looked so weary, so jaded and worn, for he had come from the northlands with his friends. We had not expected him, or a meal would have been in readiness. Martha is too good a housekeeper not to have seen to that."

"You are jesting, Mary," the other rejoined.

"Nay; it is true. You are, as none knows better than your brother and I. So, instantly she set about her preparations. We had no serving woman to help her, for the long period of sickness from which Lazarus, our brother, was even then making but slow recovery, had impoverished us greatly. Had it not been for Martha"—

"You must not speak of those things, Mary, or I will take this task from you."

"Yea, but I will. It is only right that our guest should know the truth about you. Moreover, if you do not refrain, I will tell him that Bar-Johanan sought your hand in marriage, and that for love of us, you heeded the voice of duty rather than the call of the heart. Therefore, be silent!"

Martha's face suddenly fell, and tears welled unbidden to her eyes as Mary continued.

"My soul rejoiced at the coming of the Lord. There

were many things I desired to ask him, for I had been pondering much what he had said when last he graced our home. It was of Lazarus. I had striven in vain to understand why, if the Heavenly Father were good and loved us all, my brother should have to suffer so. And before any of the neighbors learned of his arrival and came to him with their trials and doubts, as they often did, I sought the chance of quiet. I had forgotten all else as I sat there at his feet. It seemed to me as though the dark veil that shrouds human life had been rent with the sword of God. I saw glimpses of his divine purpose; and though I knew not all the secret meaning of his providences, a new faith—a trust that clothed the soul with calm—enfolded me. It was even as I had gathered from the lips of the disciples, when Jesus had stilled the storm, and when peace fell upon the panic-stricken men like a mother's kiss upon an infant's brow. Now you can see why I had forgotten Martha, the meal, and the service I should have lent."

"And also," broke in the other, "why I now realize how foolish I was in speaking as I did. Seeing Mary sitting there, I cried, 'Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me.' Yet I was worried. The hospitality I wanted to show him was already long deferred, and my pride was hurt. But he looked at me so understandingly. He had had a mother of his own, and he could read the workings of a woman's mind. There was no reproof in his voice, but he said, 'Martha, Martha,

thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'

"I admit I was annoyed that I had been so impatient and irritable. But I was harassed, as I have said, and that is still my one excuse for that which was inexcusable. For now I see clearly that the Master sought to show me that he needed no elaborate preparations to add to the comfort of the hour. Yea, it were better to seek the spiritual as the center of lasting good rather than anything else. Before many days were past we knew it. Is not that so, Mary?"

Instantly, we realized that the one thing of which we had hoped to hear was upon her tongue.

"It was when that crushing blow fell," she went on. "Lazarus was taken from us by the hand of death. What profited all our care, our ceaseless labors? We could not thrust aside the dread specter. Then we cried out for our Divine Friend. If only he had been there! It was four days later before Jesus came. Whether word had been borne to him, I never thought to ask. But as we told him our grief, for the first time I truly read his heart toward us. The tears which fell from his eyes showed the depths of his compassion. Forgive me if I hasten over what happened that day. It seems still too sacred for speech. Yet, be it said, he stood there beside that tomb, and with commanding voice, bade Lazarus come forth from the house of death. I shuddered, closing my eyes in utter dread.

Then, as I looked again, there stood our beloved one alive, greeting us with rapturous words of wonder.

"You will not marvel that I felt we must render fullest honor to him to whom we owed so priceless a boon. But we were not alone in that. Simon the Leper, who had also been cured by Christ's touch, must share in such a privilege. So a great supper was prepared. Our friends were gathered there, as were the Twelve, with the blessed Sovereign of life and death reclining in the central place, and Lazarus beside him. I could scarcely believe it possible as I looked upon our brother —he whom we had never thought to see again, living, and with a flush of returning health upon his cheek such as I had not seen for years. And then, to mar the joy of that festive hour, came that unhappy incident. I do not speak of Mary, but of what followed her act of adoration.

"Nay, sister, I beg. Speak not of me," cried Mary.

"Did you not tell of Bar-Johanan? Besides, it is already set down by some who have written of the Lord. There is nothing to conceal." She continued, addressing us. "I had noticed Mary softly steal away. But so occupied was I seeing to the needs of our guests that I gave her no second thought. But she returned bringing with her a cruse of costly spikenard. It had been given to her by our father in happier days, before life had become so straitened. And I had besought her, more than once, to sell it at the apothecary's. Yet she had clung to it as the one treasure remaining to her.

This she unsealed as she knelt behind the Saviour's place, pouring out the contents upon his feet—those feet that had grown weary, treading the ways of loving service for others. None would have noticed Mary's act, for the conversation was animated, as indeed it must be where the divine One is.

"There was one thing, however, which my sister had never anticipated. That is so, is it not, Mary? She had never thought of the rich, all-pervading fragrance of that spikenard. It filled the house like the breath of flowers in midsummer. I detected it at once. I saw, too, the astonishment of our friends. Then one spoke up, 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' It was Judas Iscariot. The greed gleaming in those steely eyes showed the contemptible spirit in which he spoke. Why must he draw attention to what no sincere and kindly heart would have alluded? Or why fling the shadow of his bitter reproaches across the adoring homage of my sister? It was her way of showing the deep, immeasurable gratitude we both felt to One who had wrought a work so sublime. My heart surged with anger. All the courtesy demanded by hospitality had vanished. I was on the point of speaking, but a look from Jesus restrained me. He turned to Judas, saying, 'Let her alone. Why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me!' He laid his hand reassuringly on Mary's arm, adding, 'Against the day of

my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.'

"Mary had risen to her feet. It had all been so unexpected, so undeserved, and her face was scarlet with shame, as though she had been detected in an unwomanly act. But the Master said to the company, 'Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.' I knew he discerned the love and thankfulness of us both—something which lay too deep for words.

"Mary and I have not always agreed upon many matters, for we are so diverse in temperament. Yet she knows that, far from blaming her for what she did that night, I loved her for it. She proved to all assembled in this house that we recognized our debt unto him. And though we could never repay him for all he had brought to us of hope in despair, comfort in sorrow, and the revelation of the unfathomed affection of God, we could, at least, acknowledge our devotion to him. What say you, my sister?"

"Only this, that thrice happy am I that while the divine Master was with us, I was permitted to show my love to him in life. To gladden his heart by the outpourings of the soul is the highest privilege a mortal can know. And the best the heart can offer to One so great is all unworthy of his acceptance."

We took our leave of these gracious women. The thought burned within us that surely it were better to

set the affections on the things of Christ than those of earth. All that engenders strife, that causes discord and division, shrinks into insignificance in his realized presence. And best of all is the love which finds expression, not in loud protestation and fulsome praise, but in deeds that fill the home with undying fragrance.

## XII

## THE STORY OF THE CENTURION OF CAPERNAUM

STRIDING along the streets of Capernaum, he was pointed out to us. But his tall, erect figure, with its martial bearing, was sufficiently striking to kindle interest.

"Who is he?" we asked our guide.

"Why," came the relpy, "it is he of whom you inquired."

"Not the centurion himself?" we asked in surprise, for we had not hoped to be so fortunate in discovering the unnamed officer with so little difficulty.

"Yea," answered the man. "Capernaum is not so large a city that your description of him who obtained succor for his servant should not succeed. Come! I will take you to him."

"But"— We hesitated. What were we to say to him now we had found him?

"You have only to name the Galilean to him, and you will find a ready means of unloosing his tongue."

The introduction being made, the centurion graciously invited us to his quarters beside the city gates, while our guide discreetly retired. It was a handsome apartment, luxuriously furnished, betokening a man

of wealth as well as authority. And as soon as we were comfortably ensconced on a low divan, the officer spoke:

"I am honored by this visit, and as I have already said if there be any word I can impart concerning Jesus, the Christ, right gladly will I do your bidding. Tell me, I pray you, what you desire to know."

"We want you to tell your own story of that meeting with the Master. But first, may we ask, why you, who are a Gentile, speak of him as 'Jesus, the Christ'?"

The officer gazed at us steadily for a moment, as though deciding if our question were prompted by idle curiosity or by genuine interest in what was a matter of the first importance.

"You have asked of that which lies in my inmost soul," he said at length, "but I will withhold nothing from you, for I believe that you also love him. But let me tell you of my life in my own way, for I am not accustomed to speak much."

He paused again, as though trying to set his thoughts in order.

"First, I understand why you feel it strange that one who is a Gentile—for my father was a Phoenician and my mother a Greek—should be found among the followers of the Galilean. And, perchance, it is stranger still that one who is a man of war should revere him who was so manifestly a lover of peace. But your doubts shall be dissolved as we proceed. In my youth, I was somewhat headstrong and wild. I could not

brook the placid ways of the scholar nor the dull round of business. I was born to be a soldier of fortune. That is why I found service with the armies of Rome. Many and long were the campaigns I saw, and as for stirring scenes, where steel clashed on steel, where rivers ran red with the blood of the slain—But wait! 'Twas not for tales of conquest you came. I crave your pardon.

"I became, eventually, a centurion. That is not a rank as high as some suppose. It carried with it command of only one hundred men. But what men they could prove—when one might choose them as I did mine! Yet while my wage was smaller than I could wish, there were chances of pillage which brought wealth to the fortunate—should they be troubled little with that plague called conscience. And such was my lot. In due time, when I had completed my term of foreign service, I had a goodly sum. And as though the gods favored one who had been all too unmindful of them, as I would once have said, my father at his death left me all he possessed.

"I came here to Capernaum, thinking to spend my years in pleasure and luxury. But it was not to be. For the first time, I had all that heart could wish, but I discovered, then, that it was not what the heart wished. There was something else. What was it? I had asked myself the question a thousand times without getting an answer. And, as it fell out, I turned to another for aid. He was a saintly rabbi of the synagogue here.

His name you may have heard: Rabbi Jehudi—a man of piety, wisdom, and many years. And what do you think he said? That there were not many gods, but One. He was Jehovah. He had revealed himself unto Abraham, the patriarch, said my friend, giving him the promise of becoming the head of a chosen nation, and saying, 'In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

Many other things did the rabbi impart to me from the holy writings of his faith, and not a few of these touched me to the quick. For instance, he said, 'If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.' And another, 'Honor the Lord with thy substance.' And, as I have said, it was as though such words were written for me, and me alone. I began to inquire further into the faith my Jewish neighbors held dear. And the more I did so, the surer I was that they had found what I had so long desired—the way of life, of blessedness, and peace. Although I was not of their nation, yet remembering that the Lord Jehovah had promised that all the families of the earth should know the blessing, I took courage. The light came to me. I found a new and living faith. God, the Lord, who had ever been mindful of me, though I had proved unmindful of him, had blessed me richly in material and physical good. I could not be ungrateful. And so, to show that I truly held my wealth as a trust, recalling also that some of it was mine only by violence, I looked for some means

of making restitution. But I grow wearisome, my friend?"

"Nay, not so," we answered. "This is what we would hear."

"Well, then, your boredom is of your own seeking. But let me proceed. The more I learned of this new faith, the greater my wonder at the patience and beneficence of the Almighty One. And, as I worshiped with my friends, I felt they, too, realized that. Yet I could not but feel that the synagogue in which we met was unworthy of its divine object. It was old, and doubtless to many it was hallowed by the prayers and praises of the years. Still, it did not seem meet to worship the Giver of every good and perfect gift in a sanctuary so poor. The more I thought of it, the more this did burn within me. So I resolved at length, if the elders would permit it from one who was but a proselyte, to build a new house for our God. But the satisfaction that gave those people was as naught compared with the joy it gave me thus to show my gratitude for the blessings I had received.

"My peace of mind, however, was dispelled by the sudden sickness of my servant. You may wonder at that. Full well I know that a slave usually received but little consideration from his master. But in this case it was different. I loved the man. If ever there were a faithful soul, it was he. We had been together on many a hard-fought field. We had shared the rigors of a winter campaign, and the hardships common to a sol-

dier's life. But that was not all. Once when we were in Gaul, a javelin hurled at me would have mortally wounded me, but for him. He thrust me aside from its path, but in doing so, he was grievously hurt himself. That was some years before the sickness of which I now speak.

"Is it surprising, then, that his life meant much to me? I bade my own physician to attend him. But all he could do brought no relief from the cruel pangs that held him fast. And I, who had often seen the pallor of death overspread the faces of both friend and foe, knew that my faithful slave was beyond mortal aid. I stood by his side. His glassy eyes were upon me. I saw he was trying to speak. I bent over him as with difficulty he framed his lips. One word passed them. It was 'Jesus.'

"At once I divined his meaning. Singularly enough, it had never once occurred to me. But instantly that name brought back what I had heard. The fame of the Galilean had spread abroad. Ever since he had taken up his abode in Capernaum, his words of surpassing wisdom, and his power to cure the maladies of mankind, had created a deep impression on the life of the city. More than once, I had intended going forth to see and hear him. My slave had done so, and he it was who had first reported to me the power this Teacher undoubtedly possessed. But, like so many more, I had deferred examining these things for myself, and knew not the loss I was incurring.

"However, as I have said, at the word of my slave, I thought of Jesus. Some had said he was the Messiah of Israel's hope, that he was the incarnate Christ. And now I felt at a loss what to do. Perchance, being gifted thus, he were divine. How much greater, therefore, the presumption on my part to ask him, the Son of God, to heal a common slave. Yea, more, the slave of an alien from Israel's nation. Yet I was so possessed with the idea that Jesus could help us in our plight that I determined to act in some way.

"I hastily betook me to my friend, the Rabbi Jehudi, putting my case to him. Not being a Hebrew, where I would be impotent, he as a Jew and an elder of the people might prevail. To my intense relief he consented. And he and three others of the synagogue went forth to the humble lodging of the Galilean to invoke his aid. Therefore to the stricken man I bore the glad tidings that they had gone in quest of the divine Healer of human pain. As I waited their return, suddenly it broke upon me that I was the most contemptible of men. What right had I to turn to him and expect him to leave his work, perhaps to quit the evening meal of which he had commenced to partake? Had I borne my slave to his door, and besought his gracious succor, that would have been more than I, a Gentile and a man of war to boot, were warranted in doing. But, instead, I had bidden him come to me as though I had the right to command his services. Was he a slave? Was he a soldier of my band to take orders from me?

My heart burned with very shame. I knew not what to do. The gleam of hope which had lighted up my slave's face was before mine eyes. I dared not disappoint him. And yet, were the Master indignantly to refuse to do my bidding—as he well might—it would be a thing as hard to endure.

"While I was turning it over in my mind, two of my envoys returned. Their faces were all animation. I knew they bore good news. They told how they had commended me to Jesus as one who loved their nation, and who had even built them a house of prayer as an offering to the Almighty. And, in token of his appreciation of what they had said, he had readily consented to respond to their request.

" 'But,' I objected. 'You did not speak of yonder synagogue and my part therein to him? Truly, my friends, I am grieved at that. How would he regard my request? I desired him to come because one whose life I hold dear hangs by but a thread. I would that you had appealed to his compassion for the stricken, rather than have him think I had bought some claim to his help.'

"I was perplexed, nay, mortified. Swiftly, however, my course was made plain. I hurried from the house in the hope that I might intercept him. And fortune was with me. I caught sight of the rabbi and his companion, and Jesus walking between them. He was conversing with them as they drew nigh. But Jehudi saw me, and as they stopped, he asked if it were too late.

" 'Nay, but'—I turned to Jesus. His interest none could question. As I gazed upon his face, my soul was captured. I tell you that I, who have served Herod so long, and have looked often upon his royal magnificence, I who once saw the Emperor himself, never looked on one so kingly of manner, so majestic of person, so masterful in bearing. It is beyond me to put it into words. I cannot. It was not his attire, for I noted that he wore the garb of the common people. But he seemed to radiate nobility and power. I felt I could not utter the deep thoughts his very presence stirred within me. But at last I exclaimed, 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it,'

"Even then, I wondered if I had expressed myself in the best way. Yet something within prompted me to speak thus. I recognized in him the glory of the great Jehovah. To my dim eyes it was as though an aura clothed him with a holy light. His peasant dress was forgotten; he stood appareled in robes of celestial radiance. But I was sensible of the fact that power belonged unto him. He had but to speak the word—to command the vile forces that prey upon man's welfare to recede—and his will would be done. Yet, again I questioned myself whether I had indeed convinced

him that no arrogant pride had prompted the request for his gracious help. He turned to the others as though, for a moment, my fears were well-founded. I could scarcely believe my ears, however, when he said: 'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

" 'Faith?' I asked myself. 'Does he not note that I, a soldier of Rome, cannot be counted among the chosen race?' But even while I thus debated it in my heart, he turned that divine face upon me.

" 'Go thy way,' he said. 'And as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.'

"I hastily uttered my grateful thanks to him, for I was consumed with eagerness to see for myself if my servant were indeed healed. It struck me that he almost wished to go with me. Only that my trust in him might not be hampered in its development did he fail to accompany me. Imagine both my pleasure and satisfaction in seeing my servant freed from the scourge of suffering, fully restored and waiting to greet me eagerly.

"Yet have I not told all. Nay, the best is still to be imparted to you. My soul was aflame with devotion to this marvelous Master. I would gladly have thrown in my lot with him, and have sworn my vows of loyalty to him as I had once done to Caesar. But shortly afterward, I was transferred to the command of Tiberius. Many were the duties devolving upon me, and, I fear, some of my high resolves were allowed to lie

dormant in my heart. It was not that I had grown unmindful of the great mercy he had shown unto me, but only that life was so full. The months sped by. And then, tidings came to me from my old comrade in arms, Longinus.

"We had been together in the same legion in Gaul, but the life of a soldier is not his to order as he would. And so our paths had long diverged. We had much in common, and knowing how that slave of mine had hazarded his life for me, naturally I had informed Longinus of his wonderful recovery. Still, as I was about to tell you were I not so prone to wander, a letter came to me from my comrade.

"It told how my friend was then stationed in Jerusalem. That I well knew, for he had written to me before. But this was the momentous word he sent me. He had been detailed to carry out a sentence of crucifixion upon three men. Two were notorious brigands, condemned to die publicly for their deeds of violence. And the third— My sight swam as I made out the name. It was Jesus of Nazareth!

"My Benefactor, the One who had brought such blessing to my home? I could not believe it! Accused as a deceiver of the people! I read on, my heart growing hot within me at the enormity of it all. It was unthinkable that Rome, with its boasted love of justice, should not only allow, but also sanction, such a vile travesty of fair play.

"Longinus was always clever at describing an event;

much better, in fact, than in the handwriting he used to set it down. But as he went on to tell of the dread happenings of that day, my soul recoiled. Remember, we are both soldiers, accustomed to deeds of blood and scenes of violence, but how it affected my former comrade, I will let you judge. See, I have the epistle still at hand."

The centurion turned to a chest of curious workmanship. It was heavily carved, and its corners and lock were of beaten bronze. Taking out a parchment scroll, he scanned it for a moment and then began to read aloud.

"And thus, my friend, did the weary hours crawl by. Detestation and loathing filled my breast. It was not because three men were hanging in the tortures of crucifixion. You and I have looked on grimmer things than that. It was the unusual character of the central figure, and the outrageous demonstration of some of the spectators. You will be wrathful at me for speaking thus. I respect your religious views. That I had little or no religion enableth me to appreciate the sincerity of one like thee who embraceth an alien faith because he discerned the truth. But, shameful though it be, those who mocked and jeered at yon stricken Man were not only the vile and ignorant, but also the chief priests and elders of thy faith. I omitted to say that this man's name was Jesus, the teacher of Galilee. I recall what thou didst once relate to me of thy meeting with him, and of the marvels he wrought in curing thy slave of his malady. I have ofttimes intended to ask thee if that cure were complete, and if it were perma-

nent. Still, to the matter in hand. I heard what these men said to their Victim. They taunted him with being a King. They told him if he were divine to prove it by getting down from the cross. For myself, it were proof more convincing that he remained there, and that with such patience and self-control, he met their chidings and bitter jests.

"Hour after hour did this continue. I cursed my fate that I should have to bear a part in such a spectacle. I did not join the legions of Caesar to aid an unwashed mob cruelly to bait an innocent Man. My sword almost leaped from its scabbard at the sight. For, if I may trust thy discretion, from the day that thou didst tell me of this Galilean and his bounty toward thee, I had heard much of his gracious thought for men, especially those, like myself, to whom religion made but small appeal.

"Then at midday something happened. The skies were overspread with thick clouds. It was as though the sun itself hid its face from a scene so hideous. The mob became frightened, then panic-stricken. The people scattered and began to surge down the hillside back to the city. Before long my four men and I, together with a handful of women—his mother, I think, and her companions—alone remained. The earth shook beneath our feet. The thunders rolled overhead. It was awesome! The face of this Jesus suddenly lit up with a radiance I cannot describe or explain. And I heard him say, 'It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

"I understood not what that meant, but as I gazed upon his dead form, recalling his noble courage, I, Stoic as I have been all my life, felt the majesty of his character. The words they had hurled at him, accusing him of blas-

phemy recurred to me: 'He made himself the Son of God.' Some mighty impulse gripped my heart, and I exclaimed, 'Truly, this was the Son of God.' "

The centurion stopped reading, and looking steadfastly at us he said, gravely, "Longinus was right. This epistle moved me so greatly that I hastened to some who were intimate with Jesus, telling them what I had heard. I put to them the question then clamoring for answer in my brain: 'What think ye? Is this indeed the Christ?'

"Their answer was convincing indeed. They had seen in him the fulfilment of God's ancient promise of a Messiah. And I, too, who had been led by devious ways from my beliefs in gods many to the Supreme and only Ruler of the universe, who had been brought into personal contact with Jesus that memorable day, now declare to you that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

We thought his narrative had ended. He was gazing through the window with unseeing eyes. Then, impulsively, he clutched our arm. "Do not make the mistake I made, limiting his mercy by the foolish bounds of reason, or missing the blessing of his sacred fellowship. What a Comrade he would have proved had my faith been as great as yours may be. And now, farewell!"

## XIII

## THE STORY OF JOHN MARK

"YOU are the mystery man of the Gospels, are you not?" we challenged.

The young man looked at us a moment without answering, as though wondering whether to take us seriously or not. Then, seeing we were trying to be friendly, he bade us be seated.

"I do not know just what you mean," he replied. "Mystery man? Why do you speak of me like that?"

"Because, indeed, you are. We have heard of one whose name was unrecorded, but who knew the Lord Christ. Yea, and who also was fully acquainted with the two chief apostles, Peter and Paul."

He smiled genially. "It is useless to conceal anything from you. You have, by some chance, learned my secret. But that being so, what do you seek further?"

"That which you and you alone can relate. What part did you play on that fateful night when the divine Master was betrayed? Yea, and since?"

"Before I consent to answer that, to what purpose would you put the information?"

"To none, except that your brethren in the faith, who had no opportunity of seeing Christ, may view him

through the eyes of those who beheld him. Surely that were purpose enough to warrant your help."

"Yea, and with that I am well content. Privileges are ours only that we may share their bounty with others. Wherefore, hear me patiently."

"That we will, and right gladly."

He hesitated. "First if it please you, come with me."

He led the way from the room in which we sat, through the doorway, and out to a stone staircase, built upon the side of the house. We mounted this, and then, taking a key from his girdle, he opened a massive door and bade us enter.

"This," said he, in a quiet and reverent voice, "is the place that can speak more eloquently to your soul than mortal tongue. Perhaps you were not aware when you sought out the house of Mary, my mother, that you came to the place where tarried the Christ of God. It is even so. And this is the sacred chamber where he ate the paschal meal with his friends."

We looked about with awe. The place on which we stood was indeed holy ground. Though many had since been there, though this had also proved a refuge for the affrighted disciples, and where Pentecost had brought the outpouring of the Spirit, our eyes were fixed upon the spot where the Lord of heaven had spent his last evening on earth. At the far end of the spacious apartment, still stood the triclinium—a low series of tables, shaped like a horseshoe—at which the guests reclined on rugs. The chief seat was in the center.

And there the Master had taken his place after he had washed the outstretched feet of his friends. We peopled the vacant places. We saw the look of amazement on the faces of those men as they listened to the voice divine. And then perplexity, as Judas went out, turning to grief as Jesus spoke of the severance that night must bring, and the shame that would follow.

That room was too sacred for speech. The young man felt it as we did. Touching our arm, he led us forth again into the bright sunlight, and back to the cool shadows of his living room.

"Here we may talk freely," he said, as we settled ourselves amid the comfortable appointments of his home. "You have asked much of me in bidding me speak of those eventful days, but I thank you. Yea," as he noted our look of surprise, "because nothing lies nearer to my heart. You were astonished when I told you that this was the house to which our Lord came that night. But it is even so. My father—whose memory is blessed—was among those to whom Jesus was the veritable Christ. He loved the Master. And knowing that Jesus would possibly desire to eat the Passover within the city's bounds, and fearing, too, the wiles of his foes, he sent word secretly to him, saying that, should Jesus so wish, our guest chamber was available for that purpose. They had agreed on this. Should the Master wish to come, he was to send two trusted messengers to make the necessary preparations."

"So your father was 'the goodman of the house'?"

"Assuredly! But I did not know of this until later. I was but a youth, and my curiosity was aroused by the coming of the two disciples. I knew them by sight. Since then I have learned that they were Peter and John. Well, as I was saying, when the Master and his twelve friends arrived that evening, I was at hand. There was some reason why they were to celebrate the Passover privately like that. And my father's evasive replies to my questions served only to whet my interest the more.

"Some time afterward, they began to leave the Upper Room. It was Peter's injunction to some of them not to make a noise, which indicated that some strange project was planned. And as I lurked in the shadows, at the foot of yonder staircase, listening to the Lord's thanks to my father for his gracious hospitality, I resolved to see for myself what was imminent. Thus I followed them, at a distance, across the brook Kidron, toward the garden. I had anticipated that. Gethsemane was an olive grove, the property also of my father. Months before, having seen the Master resting there beneath the trees, he had begged him to make free use of the inclosure any time he chose. And thither they went that night.

"Frankly, I was disappointed. It seemed that they merely intended to sleep there, beneath the cool waving boughs. Yet from my hiding place—for I had played in that spot as a boy, and every nook was familiar to me—I heard something. Jesus had taken

three of his disciples aside. And with earnest tones, he asked them to remain on guard while he prayed. 'Why was that?' I asked myself. Was there mischief afoot? That decided me. I too would watch. Evidently there was some attack to be feared.

"The moon was almost at the full, and I could see plainly what was happening. The Master had gone aside to pray, when his three friends, their backs against the tree trunks, fell fast asleep. I was moved to arouse them, only that would have revealed my eavesdropping. Besides, I was consumed with desire to know what it all meant. I heard him say, 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt!' He went back to the three to find them sleeping. And then again in the same spot, he prayed saying, 'O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done.' "

An involuntary exclamation escaped us. John Mark paused in his narrative, shooting a puzzled look in our direction.

"Do you know," we said, "you have made plain in this hour that which has long perplexed us? We have often wondered how the sacred writers could have known what fell from the Master's lips in that tragic experience, seeing that his friends were asleep. Now we understand."

"That is the explanation that I have given you. Certainly, it was I. But do not interrupt me. It then appeared to me, following these words of sublime sur-

render, that Jesus was strangely strengthened. A look of conquest was upon his face as he rose to his feet. He slowly walked toward the three disciples. They were fast locked in slumber once more. And the Master said, 'Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. . . . Behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.'

"I pondered the meaning of those words. But before I could decide what they implied, I was startled by the flashing of torches, and the noise of men breaking through the undergrowth as though the need for concealment was past. My blood ran cold. It was so unexpected that I was terrified. One of them detached himself from the rest. As he advanced through the clearing, the moon lit up his face. I recognized him as one of the disciples whom I had seen leave the guest room before the others. Since then I have learned it was Judas Iscariot. What could it mean? Why this armed band?

"This man went up to Jesus, saying, 'Hail, Master!' Then he kissed him. Jesus looked at him reproachfully, 'Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' Immediately there was a rush. Two of the guards closed in on the Lord, while the rest encircled the panic-stricken disciples. Some broke through and scattered to the thick covering of the trees. Others were taken. Among these was Simon Peter. He was ever a valiant, if impulsive, man. I saw him swiftly unsheathe a

sword he had concealed on his person. He struck a sudden blow at one of Christ's captors, and the man's ear was almost severed. But Jesus laid his hand on the wound, saying, as his sacred touch healed the man, 'Suffer ye thus far.' Then he surveyed those who held him prisoner. 'Whom seek ye?' he asked. They replied, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' And Jesus said, 'Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me?' Then he added, 'I have told you that I am he. If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.'

"They were about to lead him off to the city. I knew not why, but I surmised that some plot was being hatched. But even if his followers had failed him, he should not lack a companion. Deep in my soul I loved him—and fierce and unreasoning is the love of youth. I did not know what I intended to do, or how I, unaided, might effect his rescue. But I leaped from my place of concealment. I had a mad impulse to hurl myself upon the guard and with my bare hands beat them off. Yet it was futile. They seized me instantly. And then it flashed on my mind what it would mean to my father were they to arrest me. His house and lands would be confiscated and he, perchance, punished for his son's interference with the agents of the high priest. With a sudden movement, I wrested myself free. One of them clutched at me wildly. He caught my robe, but as it tore from my shoulders in his grasp, I fled.

"Pursuit was impossible, as I well knew. They could

never find me. But I waited there in the undergrowth, my heart pounding in my breast like the hammer of the smith. The flickering lights faded from sight. And the garden was wrapped again in velvet silence. Trembling in every limb, I wended my way homeward. I gained my chamber without meeting a soul. And through the long night I tossed sleeplessly. My young life had been touched by tragedy.

"I cannot trust myself to speak of what followed the next day. You know of the frightful deeds which, like some foul stain upon the honor of my people, cannot be expunged. My father bore the tidings to us as we met for our evening meal. Jesus, the Prince of men, was no more. That was all he would say, but his eyes were full of anguish. Yea, for, as I told you, my father also revered him as the Christ who was promised to our nation.

"It is written what followed that bitter day on Calvary. And to this same Upper Room came the disciples that night, seeking a place to hide from their foes. My father could not have turned them away, even had he so wished; for, you see, they dared not try to flee the city. They would have been arrested at the gates. There was no other friendly roof where they could be concealed. Only Judas Iscariot had knowledge where the Master had eaten the Passover, and he had slain himself. Thus they were safe for a time, until the fury of the priests abated. Yet here, so I learned, came the news that the Lord had risen. And here, in the very

chamber you have seen was he manifest to those astonished but rejoicing hearts.

"Pentecost followed. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon that company of the Lord's believers. A notable ingathering was made. And the Apostles, with one mind, were set on further conquests until, to the farthest bounds of mankind, the glorious tidings should be proclaimed.

"I must hasten, for there is still much to tell. My father had died. And his last words to me were, in administering his estate, to see that all possible support was afforded the cause of Christ. 'Yea,' said he, 'would that you yourself might serve a King so noble, and plant his standard in the souls of men.'

"That was, of course, but a fond wish. So I thought until, as time passed, I was amazed beyond measure. Saul of Tarsus, that onetime relentless antagonist of the truth, had become its foremost champion. He had planned a long pilgrimage through distant parts to declare the message of redemption. But what do you think? It was my own uncle, Barnabas, who was to travel with him, and who would take no denial but I must accompany them. Barnabas lived in Antioch, where also he who bore the cross—now known as Simeon, called Niger—also lived. And there he had fallen under the spell of the Gospel.

"Nothing loth, I consented. I was young and enthusiastic. This promised me adventure the like of which I had never imagined. And from Seleucia we

set sail to the island of Cyprus, and afterward to Perga and Pisidia. In Iconium persecution met us. And after a time, we moved on to Lystra. There Paul, having healed a man crippled from birth, was hailed as one of the gods, as was also Barnabas. Only with difficulty did they keep the people from paying divine honors to them. But a notable opportunity had presented itself, and Paul, always a great and moving orator, verily surpassed himself.

"Yet again trouble broke out. Certain mischief-loving Jews from Antioch and Iconium had followed us there. And they so incensed the men of Lystra against Paul that they set upon him with stones, hurling them with unleashed passion, until he was left for dead. Fortunately for Barnabas and me, we were absent at the time, but as soon as word reached us, we hurried to the scene. Yet despite our fears, happily our leader lived. And without delay, we bore him to the next city.

"I would weary you were I to tell you more of our experiences. But I must speak of that which I cannot now look back upon without bitter regret. When we reached Pamphylia, I had endured all I could. I implored Paul to think of us, if not of himself, and abandon such a perilous enterprise. He was adamant. Nothing could alter his course! To serve his Lord by life or death was his unwavering resolve. And his firm courage was such that Barnabas, who had wavered under my urgings, also determined to go on.

"That, however, did not affect my decision. I had

suffered hardships uncomplainingly, but—I beg you, do not judge me too harshly—I was young. I loved life. Moreover, I was homesick, hungering for a sight of my mother and of the house where I was born. Of course, I was cowardly, weak, and altogether unworthy of the friendship of such a consecrated soul as Paul or of such a cause as that of Christ. And in later days I realized this. I tried to make amends. Yea, hearing that Paul planned a second journey, I sent word to my uncle Barnabas, asking that I might be given the chance to prove my courage anew. Paul, however, was too wise a strategist, too earnest a servant of the divine Lord, to risk another failure on my part. He was blameless in that; I had turned traitor before, and he might well question my constancy.

"Still, he could not read my heart. Where he was uncertain of me, I was now convinced that Christ had called me into his service. The comforts of home were intolerable. How could I remain there at ease, knowing that men lacked the blessings of Christ's grace because none dared to bear the story of redemption? And so, after a further journey to Cyprus with Barnabas, I found a new leader. You have already guessed who it was. It was he whom I first saw that memorable day when the Master sent the two disciples to my home —even Simon Peter. After he was released from prison, he must perforce resume his labors. I consented to accompany him. I found him changed indeed. He was no longer boastful or prone to be contemptuous of

others. He was a man whom one could honor and admire. I was about to say he was chastened and subdued, but that would scarcely suffice. He was rather as gold that had been in the crucible, and on which the fire had done its work.

"Together we journeyed, proclaiming everywhere the good news of redemption. And as I listened to his graphic words, in which the very figure of the Christ adored was pictured before men's eyes, I longed for—yea, coveted earnestly—that power of description that was his. For as he spoke, it was as though the notes of Nature's mighty voice echoed in his tones. I thought I could hear the thunders rumbling amid the hills, or the shrill winds that howled across the Galilean Lake when the storm swept down upon the boats. The flash and glint of sunlit spray was in his eyes as he spoke of Christ, the Saviour of the world. No wonder I yearned for power to bring the truth to men as he did.

"Then I thought of something. I had one gift which Simon lacked. In boyhood days, the pen of the ready writer had been intrusted to me. I might not tell the tale of God's infinite love for mankind, nor quicken men's souls with the story of that sublime death of sacrifice; but I could set it down that all might read. And this I did. In those brief pages which bear my name—all unmerited though the privilege was—I have set forth, from the lips of him who fell shamefully, but rose superbly to new heights, that simple narrative of the Hero of humanity, Jesus Christ."

## XIV

## THE STORY OF PROCULA, THE WIFE OF PILATE

WE stood abashed. After a long journey and then with tiresome diplomacy, we had at length gained admittance to the modest villa on the outskirts of Rome where dwelt Procula, the widow of Pontius Pilate. As we stood awaiting audience, we did not know how to address her, or to atone for the intrusion. That she, of proud patrician family, might resent it was possible. But bearing the name of one who had been reviled and execrated by multitudes, it was almost inevitable. All our fears, however, fell from us like the brown leaves of autumn before the winds, as we were ushered into her presence. Her gracious words of welcome banished our disquiet.

"I know why you have come, and gladly will I meet your request. There is but one thing I must ask."

"Any wish of yours is a command," we ventured. "What do you desire?"

"That you will not too severely condemn him whom I still love, for he was betwixt his enemies and his ambitions, and in the intervening depths he was engulfed."

Her face was shadowed with the sadness of memory,

but in a moment she recovered her wonted calm and began the narrative of her days.

"Glad were the hearts of Pilate and myself when honor sought him out, and he was appointed governor of Judea. It was a noble privilege in itself. To be the representative of imperial Rome meant much, for it gave him the right to rule as a king and to secure the good government of the people. Yet it was more than that. It was a steppingstone to preferment, and to even greater power. While that did not weigh unduly with me, yet being a woman, naturally I desired to see my husband find due recognition of his gifts and a sphere worthy of his ability. And I was happy that I could accompany him. A few years before, that would have been impossible. An official was not allowed to take his wife with him when sent on the service of the Emperor. But that edict had been withdrawn, and so I sailed from sunny Italy to our new home. But erelong we found disillusionment. The anticipation is often better than the fulfilment of one's hopes. It was so in this case.

"We had scarcely settled in Jerusalem before Pilate found that all his plans were to meet opposition from those he ruled. There was some childish outburst of fury because he had ordered the standards of the army to be borne through the city. That was because they had an effigy of the Emperor upon them. And although my husband yielded to the popular clamor to this extent, that the banners were taken there by night, the fact

that he had yielded at all was misconstrued as weakness. Then there was further tumult about a new water supply. Forgive me for reminding you of this; but while he had his faults, serious, too, as some were, he was truly anxious to serve the country well.

"His plan was to bring the ample waters from the hills to the capital. But that meant an aqueduct, and aqueducts are costly. That was where he made a grave mistake. He did not apply to the imperial exchequer for money; that would have been useless. Nor did he feel justified in taxing further the already overburdened people. But, knowing that the priestly party had abundant resources which were not being used for the Temple, but were—so he learned—being taken for the private purses of some, he resolved to pay for his project with that money.

"That caused an outcry. But he was unmoved. And the work was begun. So the priests appealed directly to Rome. They accused my husband of robbery and spoliation, and threatened that they would defend their rights to the last drop of blood. Consequently, the fear of a troublesome uprising being present, the imperial power allowed the plea, and sent orders that the work must cease. I am not blind to my husband's shortcomings, but I know his intentions were good, even though he did not take the wisest way of carrying them out.

"From that day our anxieties began. Annas was the ringleader. He had been deposed from his sacred

office, but he still retained his hold on the Jewish rulers. He lost no opportunity to accuse Pilate of bribery, intrigue, and corruption, although, up to that time, he was sincere and upright and a man of unblemished integrity. Yet, familiar as I was with the workings of his mind, it was not surprising that he tended to become what they thought him. I do not excuse him. But often he was maligned because he was fighting the priests with their own weapons. Still, what troubled me most was that he was so plainly deteriorating. His fine spirit was clouded over. He had grown moody and morose, vengeful and bitter. Sometimes he would return to the palace, refusing food or even a word with me. Seated for hours alone, musing over the affairs of the day, he would then spring to his feet and pace the chamber, muttering to himself. Even his sleep was charged with thick-coming fancies, and he would start up like one who heard the call to arms.

"My heart was almost overwhelmed. Success! yea, but at what price? Surely not at the cost of manhood, self-respect, integrity—even a soul? That was a bargain all must rue. Moreover, what good could come of it? Would not the very object he desired be forfeited, and he be recalled to Rome, dishonored, ruined, and debased? My soul shrank from such a dread prospect, and yet I saw it must be so. Pilate, the renowned and envied of men, became a byword amongst the very groundlings, and I his wife, ashamed before those of my own house!

"Then there came a change that seemed to augur well. A noble Teacher from Galilee had appeared in Jerusalem. His fame had spread through the whole countryside, so they informed me, but the leaders of the Jews were bitter against him. When I inquired of Pilate about him, he said that he had learned much of this Jesus. He was no revolutionary, for even though he aroused the souls of his hearers, it was not to revolt, but to righteousness. And herein did my husband rejoice: the animosity of the elders was now diverted from him to the Galilean. Possibly it was, as Pilate said, because this Man had laid bare the hollow hypocrisy of their lives, and held up their schemings and subterfuges to contempt.

"Still, that did not explain all. My womanly curiosity was quickened for this reason. When first I went to Jerusalem, I was moved with wonder at the unfamiliar sights about me. From the palace windows, and still more as I was borne in my palanquin through the streets, I beheld pilgrims from afar. At certain seasons they would throng the city. And when I further sought to know why, I was told that it was for the sacred feasts of the Temple. From those around me, and especially from Rachel, my attendant, who was herself of the Jews, I learned much of the history of this race we ruled. Well, Rachel was strangely perturbed one evening. I feared she was sick or that bad news had reached her from her home. I loved the girl, hence my solicitude. But this is what she told me. The Naza-

rene, as she called Jesus, had entered the city that day, and had been acclaimed as the Christ by a frenzied multitude. I did not know what that implied, until I bade her to explain. It appeared that the sacred writings of their prophets held forth the promise of Jehovah that a mighty Prince and Deliverer should come. Power and dominion were to be his, and the ancient glories of Israel renewed. But in hushed tones my maiden also said that some linked this Teacher to a horrible event in their history. Wait! do I weary you with this?"

"By no means," we answered. "Pray proceed."

"Some said, reported Rachel, that this same Jesus had been born in Bethlehem. Awe-inspiring signs had heralded the event. And Herod the Great, who was then king, had learned of them from those of his court. It was said that this Babe was a king—the King of the Jews. Herod was cruel and unscrupulous. He had bought the throne he occupied, and now he feared that he would be deposed by the rightful heir to the crown. Moved by this, he caused every child in the province to be slain, so that this child should never come to wrest the scepter from his grasp. But Jesus was secretly conveyed away. He grew to manhood in some quiet spot. And now he had come forth from obscurity to proclaim his kingdom. More, he was held by some to be indeed the chosen Messiah—the Son of the Highest.

"All this I carried in my heart. I plied Pilate with many questions. He knew what the people said, for he had his secret informers everywhere so that he might

be aware of everything pertaining to the nation over which he was set. But he evaded the matter when I pressed it upon him. 'It is of little moment to me,' he said, 'whether he be divine or not. But he is no reviler nor rebel, except that he reviles the shameless iniquity of Annas and his company, and rebels against the bondage they have laid upon the people. Enough for me is that he has drawn their plottings from me to himself!'

"Could that fail to rekindle the ardor of my desire? I went forth privately to the city, accompanied only by Rachel. We were closely veiled, and none knew of it. I would not confide such rashness even to you were it not necessary I should tell you. And there, in the Temple precincts, we heard his words. Never had man spoken thus. His noble presence, his tender tones, were forgotten in the theme that burned on his lips. He spoke of love. And I who had been the slave of love must perforce listen. Yet this was of a love which bore comparison between the great sea we had sailed and the bowl wherein I laved my hands. It was the love of the eternal and supreme God—the Heavenly Father he called him—for the weary and troubled, the sinful and desolate.

"Was I not in such a plight? My heart was sore within me through anxiety for my husband. Yea, and also as I listened to that Teacher, I saw glimpses of depths into which I had fallen and heights I could never reach. My soul went out to him. As the flower turns to the sun, so did my heart respond to the calling

of God's great affection. Yet, until that hour, I had known nothing of it.

"That night Pilate returned with leaden feet and shrouded brow. I dared not ask the reason. I did not need to inquire. Some further trouble lay upon his spirit, and it seemed best to wait until he was moved to unburden his heart to me. And as he later tossed restlessly upon his couch, I watched him earnestly, with sleepless eyes. What new evil threatened us, I could not divine. Then at daybreak came a messenger, demanding instant audience. My husband arose angrily to confer with him, and when he returned to the chamber, I noticed that his face was crimson with passion.

" 'Tell me, beloved, what tidings you have received,' I implored, tremblingly. 'You know all your sorrows, even as your joys, are mine to share with you.'

" 'It is the Nazarene,' he cried. 'That foul wolf in the garb of a sheep, that son of evil clad in priestly raiment, even Caiaphas, demands that Jesus be tried for sedition. And the penalty therefor is death.'

"Seldom had Pilate spoken so freely of the cases which came to his bar. And as he departed for the judgment hall, I lay there wondering what the issue would be. In spite of myself, my eyes grew heavy with sleep and I dreamed. I beheld a deer of the forest, beset by a howling pack of dogs moving in a confused circle, waiting the chance to bear it to the ground and tear its trembling body asunder. And

then, I thought the form changed to the Nazarene, and then again to that of my husband. The hounds bayed about him. I saw their cruel fangs, white and gleaming, ready to rend him. I started up to save him, a wild scream of agony on my lips.

"Rachel came hastening to my side, frightened by my cry. But quickly reassuring her, I bade her summon Lucius, the young and trusted officer of Pilate. I dispatched him with a message to my husband, charging him, at all costs, not to become involved in any plot which should harm One so good and true. But it was for more than Jesus I was concerned. That I admit. I was filled with an unspeakable foreboding. If this were indeed the Messiah, what would befall us were we to raise our hands against him? What fiery indignation would be poured out upon us from the abode of the gods! My heart was heavy, my soul filled with a nameless dread.

"Later that day Pilate returned home. Intuitively I felt that he shrank from me. He, famed for courage in battle, to turn aside from the face of his wife? Then either my message had miscarried, or he had flown in the face of discretion. And, casting all my fears aside, I asked him what the day had brought. To my surprise, he seemed to welcome the opportunity of speaking of it, although the flush of shame mantled his brow.

" 'You will be grieved beyond measure,' he said, 'yet, try as I would, I could not do your bidding. I

saw that they had brought this Man to the judgment seat, not that his case might be tried—for they had already done that among themselves—but that he might be condemned. You know that these Jews have no longer the power to put a man to death. They retain laws that can impose such a sentence upon a man, but to carry it out is forbidden. Hence Caiaphas' party demanded the death of Jesus at my hands. But I was unwilling to be their tool. To play into their hands like that would admit that they held me in their power. I understood their guile. That I plainly showed them. It did occasion surprise, however, when they said that they had sentenced him to death. I had thought they were more subtle than thus to confess their object so openly.

" 'Yet I was confronted with another difficulty. Were I to have done what you desired, and let the Man go, they would have sent word to Rome that I had refused to administer justice. They threatened as much. They said that if I set him free, I was disloyal to Caesar. And that is the unpardonable offense in the sight of the Emperor. Therefore I endeavored to find a means of liberating him lawfully. Having examined him in private—which I was compelled to do, for they hold that, at the Passover, it would defile them even to enter into my presence—I told them I found no fault in him. And then I discovered a way by which I thought to escape from my dilemma. They said that Jesus had stirred up the people of Galilee as

well as Judea. And as Herod the Tetrarch has jurisdiction over the northern province, and I knew him to be in Jerusalem, I dispatched Jesus to him.

" 'Herod was ever as crafty as a fox. He professed to have heard the evidence against this Man. But the Tetrarch, being a Jew, would not incur the enmity of his priesthood by going against their wishes. Nor would he lose a chance of serving me an ill turn. Therefore he returned the Prisoner to me, saying that he had not condemned him, but leaving the case still to be completed. What more could I do? I took him apart once more, for your message had stirred a strange tumult within me. I asked him whence he came, and if he were indeed the Christ. And the more I gazed upon him, the surer I was that this was no misguided fellow posing as a king, nor was he a deceiver of the people. He was other than I had ever seen before. But yet I had to think of myself. I dared not hazard my career, my hopes for you as well as for myself, by ignoring their demands. Nor, on the other hand, could I, by some inexplicable restraint, accede to them by condemning an innocent man. So I agreed to scourge him—illegal though it was—in the hope that that would satisfy their wrath against him.

" 'Even that was not enough. They clamored for his blood. Then happily, I remembered their custom that a prisoner should be showed clemency at Passover time. There was a vile and dangerous criminal held in the dungeons. And for your sake, Procula, no less

than for that of the Galilean, I strove to gain my end by strategy. I had this man, Barabbas, brought to me. He was led forth to the pavement, and set beside the Nazarene. I tell you, beloved, the contrast was most marked. I could not but feel a sense of satisfaction as I looked at what my shrewdness had done. Then I gave the people a choice which actually offered no choice. It was to liberate this man, Barabbas, guilty of murder, theft, violence, and insurrection, or else Jesus.

" 'I was sure they would not have that brigand let loose upon them again, and so they would choose the Man I sought to deliver. But it was not to be. They became more vehement still. They raised an outcry which might have been heard even unto the seven hills of Rome. They affirmed that this Jesus had proclaimed himself a king in opposition to imperial Caesar, and that, under Roman law, he stood condemned to death. Thus was I compelled by force of circumstances, which even I could not command, to bow to their will, and deliver him to be crucified as a felon.' "

Procula paused for a moment. Then she continued her story.

" 'You have brought destruction on us both,' I protested. 'We shall merit and receive the retributive anger of Jehovah for this if it be, as I believe, that this is his Son.' But at that Pilate smiled, somewhat sadly, and said, 'Have no fear of that, dear heart, for I have averted any such blow. I have placed the

responsibility for that on those Jews. I laved my hands before them, bidding them be witness that I was innocent of the blood of that just Man. And they did firmly assert that his blood should be upon them, and upon their children.'

"I draw fast to the end of what I would say. It was all in vain—my plea for him and my husband's sagacity. Jesus, the Christ, was crucified on a hill beyond the walls—a place called Golgotha. But the doom we had sought to escape fell upon us. Not long after, those Jewish elders, instigated by Annas, the crafty, sent false reports to Rome. They accused him of misrule; they impeached him as a traitor to his imperial master. And many and grave though the errors which could be laid to him, grievous though the faults that I saw in him under the deteriorating influences of that city, I knew those charges to be as malicious as they were false. That mattered little. Deep in my soul I felt that it was all due to his vacillation. He had grown irresolute. He had become too careful in weighing the right against his ambitions. And we were recalled, dishonored and discredited, later to be exiled even from the Rome we loved.

"He seldom spoke afterward of those days. And I could not tear open the wound of his outraged pride. Then he died, broken and disappointed. The sun of his career set, not in a glowing sky of evening splendor, but with the thick clouds of disappointment shrouding it with the cerements of his dead hopes. So I came

to this place, myself no longer bewailing the past so much as thankful unto the Giver of all good that he allowed me to see and hear the gracious Son of his love. For my soul have I committed to his keeping. And even though I was not permitted to save him from his relentless foes, he who takes the will for the deed does not despise the service that a woman such as I would fain have rendered unto him."

## XV

## THE STORY OF SIMON, THE CYRENIAN

"I WOULD rather not speak of those matters, unless you insist," said the Cyrenian.

We did not wish to press the point unduly, but having traveled to distant Antioch in order to meet this man, we were not prepared to turn aside without a struggle. Simon, of Cyrene, was a fine specimen of the people of North Africa. His copper-colored face, with hair and beard of jet black, his broad shoulders and massive form, gave the impression of strength. But there was character there, as well as physique, and we were filled with expectancy as we waited his consent to our request.

"You ask me to recall what for long years I have tried to forget. Although, to be candid, I confess that I have never been able to put it far from me. Night and day, deep down in my heart, is lodged the memory of that dark day and the grievous part in it that befell me."

"Surely you are mistaken in that," we objected. "Yours was an honor which all men might well covet. To bear the cross for the divine Master, to lift its crushing load, and to share—in some small way—his

unique service for the race, places you among the favored of heaven."

"Rejoicing fills my soul at those words," he responded. "Surely I thought when you asked me to tell of that momentous day that you would secretly condemn me for what I did. That being clear, therefore, I will tell you what I have withheld from many.

"From distant Cyrene, as you have learned, I came to Palestine for the purposes of trade, and there I had made my home. If I may without offense speak first of myself, I had thus come in contact with the men of this country, and had found more than merchandise. They had what I had long sought in vain: a faith in one God, the Supreme Creator and Ruler of the world. The more I learned of him from my Jewish acquaintances, the more I felt the contrast between him and the uncaring gods my people reverenced. Being in this manner assured that they had received light from heaven itself, I embraced their faith. Yet, be it said, it was not from necessity nor any thought of gain except that of spiritual good and inward serenity. I was what they called a proselyte, which fitted me well as a sojourner who had been converted to their beliefs. And yet, as events have since shown, a sojourner indeed.

"However, having embraced Judaism, I must needs give obedience to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. And at stated seasons I would go to Jerusalem for the due observance thereof. It was the time of the Passover. I had purposed arriving full two days before,

but delays had hindered me. Having spent the night at an outlying village, I was pursuing my way to the Holy City, when I was compelled to stop by reason of a great multitude. I knew that the ways were always crowded with pilgrims at such times. Mirth and good feeling usually marked them. Sometimes they would even chant the songs of Zion as they traveled. There was one in which I used to join. It ran, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem . . . whither the tribes go up.'

"But wait, you are not interested in that. As I was saying, my surprise was great as I saw a crowd surging outside the gate, not happy and joyous, but moved with violent passions. Some were shouting vile epithets to the vacant air, as it seemed to me. Then, as I drew nearer, it appeared that their anger was directed at the column of soldiers, whose spears and helmets glittered in the morning sun. Still I knew that could not be. Detested though the Romans were, the populace dared not openly deride them in that manner. And I was puzzled. Elbowing my way through the press, the better to see what all this meant, I saw between the files of soldiery a Man of the Jews. He was being led out to die. I knew that, for a cumbrous cross of heavy timbers lay athwart his shoulders. But what puzzled me greatly was the crown upon his head. It was only in mockery, for it was made of a bramble branch, and its long thorns, embedded in his brow, had caused the

blood to flow. Yet what gave rise to the questionings of my soul—was that the Jews, who are so humane and merciful toward the unfortunate, should be so vengeful now. They were as cruel as thoughtless boys who torment a defenseless animal, for, even as I watched, they hurled clods of dry earth and stones at the unfortunate Man, staggering on his way. And the loud protests of the centurion were unavailing. I asked those about me who this man was, but so intent were they on their sport that they did not heed me.

"Then, suddenly, a command rang out, high above the jeering, yelling mob. The column halted. And as I pushed still nearer, I saw the Prisoner had fallen to his knees. The weight of the cross had borne him to the ground. At the centurion's word, the soldiers urged him to rise. They prodded him with the butts of their lances. One rough fellow kicked him violently, and with an oath bade him not to lie there and take his rest. But this moved the centurion to action. He ordered the cross to be raised from the prostrate Man, and they lifted him to his feet. I saw the suffering in his face. I could tell that he had not slept for some time, and moreover, his robe having slipped from his shoulders, I observed that he had been scourged, and doubtless was weakened by loss of blood.

"They were conferring together what best to do. That he could carry that heavy load farther was impossible. And then, without warning, one suddenly

seized my arm and dragged me forward. 'Here he is, sir,' said he to the officer, 'the very man for the task.'

"In spite of my protests, followed even by entreaties, they hoisted the cross upon my back. It took three of them to do so, and I, strong though my arms, could not but marvel that this Man had borne it so far. The sun was hot. The loose stones of the track made one's foothold uncertain. And as I toiled up that sloping way to Calvary's hill, I stumbled more than once beneath the weight. Yet I was busy with my own thoughts. Why was such ill fortune mine? First, I had been held back on my journey; now this evil thing had befallen me. For, though the guard did not know, they had done me a grave disservice. By having this accursed tree of death thrust upon me, I was ceremonially defiled, and therefore could not keep the solemn Passover for which I had come so far. Why had I been singled out? The answer came to me. Of course, no Roman would demean himself to aid a malefactor; no Jew could, for the reason I have mentioned. Besides, had the centurion insisted on pressing one of them into service, there would have been an uproar. But I, as you notice, being a man of color, and therefore an alien, had attracted their attention. That was the explanation. That was why the soldier had described me as the very man for the task!

"Occupied though I was with these things, I noticed the Prisoner walking before me. Now that the load was spared him, he moved with head as erect as the

guards about him. As we came upon a group of women, standing by the way, and wailing loudly as we approached, I saw him look toward them. I had not heard his voice until then, but it struck me as that of a conqueror, returning victorious, rather than a poor victim going to his death. His words linger in my mind. 'Daughters of Jerusalem,' he said, 'weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.' It sounded a gracious thing to me, although I did not then comprehend his meaning.

"At last we reached the crest of the hill. I flung the cross down wrathfully. I had fulfilled my task, and I wanted to get on my way to the city. Perchance some allowance might be made by the priests in that, unwillingly, I had been rendered unclean. But to my further annoyance, I found myself within the circle of the guard, and to torment me or anger me more, they refused to let me leave without word from the centurion. Yet as I saw, it was impossible to speak with him just then, for he was superintending the work that was going on. Two others were to be crucified with this Man. Three holes were dug. The prisoners were stretched upon the crosses, lying on the ground, and nailed to them. And then those cruel trees of torture were set up in the places prepared. Once this was done, the circle was withdrawn, the men re-formed and marched back, leaving only the officer with a quaternion, to await the end.

"Now that I was free to go, however, perversely

enough, I would not. Nay, that is not quite right. I could not go. Something held me to the scene. The mob surged around the central cross, flinging their imprecations and taunts at the Man hanging there. And for the first time I noticed that an inscription had been nailed up over his head. This was in three tongues—in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew—and as I slowly made it out I began to grasp the reason for his death. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.' Evidently he had posed as one of Israel's royal line, only to be repudiated by the Jews, and condemned by Rome. Still he did not appear to be an agitator or rebel. But the people were jeering at him, accusing him of threatening to destroy the Temple. The two thieves upbraided him for not releasing himself and them also from the agony of that lingering death. Yet to all the cruel heartlessness of the hour he offered no rebuke. He lifted his voice in prayer for them, saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

"Disgusted, sick at heart at the spectacle, I had almost decided to leave when some of the priests drew near. That seemed strange unless they had come to offer him comfort. But as I listened my gorge rose. It was but to add to the torture he was enduring. They reviled him. 'He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' And others cried, 'He trusted in God; let him deliver him now. . . . He

said, I am the Son of God. . . . Let him save himself if he be the Christ, the chosen of God.'

"This was more than I could stand. That these, the chosen representatives of Jehovah, should deride a dying man would shake the confidence of any, most of all a learner of the sacred mysteries like myself. But one thing seized my soul, and held it fast: the thought that perhaps they were wrong and he was right regarding his divine Sonship. Suppose he were Jehovah's promised One? Could any less than he have shown such superb self-control, and even make supplication for his murderers? I had, you see, made myself familiar with the hope the Jews cherished. They looked for a Messiah. And from hidden deeps came back the words of a certain prophet regarding him: 'He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. . . . But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.'

"I could not endure more. You may realize the anguish this thought caused me. If this were the Christ of God, not only had we of our faith slain him, but I—I myself—had lent my help to compass his end in bearing the cross on which he was to die. What remained to me of the hopes I once held dear? I was an outcast! No longer could I take my place among those who were guilty of this deed. I loathed a priesthood which could be party to such an evil. Nor could I seek out the

followers of Jesus. Would that I could! I was consumed with longing to have my impressions confirmed. But no pity, certainly no welcome, would they extend to the man who had sided, even involuntarily, with his foes.

"All that evening I wandered from my lodging, mingling with men of all kinds, for in the gloom none would be likely to recognize me as the cross-bearer. Rumors and gossip were rife. Excitedly, small groups discussed the weird and awful happenings of the day. The scenes on Calvary, the darkness, the quaking earth beneath their feet, were food for talk. But the most astounding of all were these facts. The heavy veil of the Temple, separating the Holy of Holies from the Sanctuary, had been torn in twain, not from the bottom upward, but from top to bottom. And what was also singular: as Jesus died, the Roman centurion had been heard to exclaim, 'Truly, this was the Son of God!'

"Stranger, however, was what happened on the third day. Some of his friends—I had thought they would have been too afraid—came openly to his tomb, to lay their spices about the stricken form. They found the tomb empty. Jesus, the Christ of Jehovah, as my heart affirmed, had risen from the dead. Afterward I went to some of his disciples. They confirmed the truth of what I had heard. And when I told them who I was, and my share in the dreadful tragedy, they proved to me that the faith Jesus had inspired in them was of genuine worth. They received me with those who

loved him, and who had banded themselves together, obedient to his word, to bear the tidings of his redemptive work to all mankind. Yea, at the hands of the Apostles I was baptized. For even though Jordan's flood could not cleanse the memory of my act from my heart, at least it gave the symbol of that grace which made me, henceforth, his servant."

Simon ceased. But there was one matter about which we were still curious.

"You are living far from Jerusalem. What are you doing here in Antioch, and what followed from those days?"

"Ah, you may well ask. Wonderful indeed have been the forgiving mercies of the Lord Christ. There were joined to the company of believers many valiant men at that time. Among these was one named Paul. He, too, had found in Jesus Christ, who was slain on Calvary, the very Messiah who was to come. That death he died was not the lot of martyrdom; it was, as you too have doubtless learned, the Divine love sacrificing itself in the costly redemption of the race from its sin and estrangement. And through the Living Lord men find forgiveness and restoration. This was Paul's theme, as indeed it was that of the other Apostles. He went forth, through towns and cities, telling the story of salvation. And here in Antioch were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had settled here, and who had embraced the faith. These needed one who understood their tongue, and who could reach them better than

others who must first overpass the barriers of race. So, with my wife and two sons, I came here to serve the Lord Christ."

"Are they also Christians, then—your wife and family?"

"Ah, now you must tread warily lest you enkindle a father's pride. Truly they are also lovers of the Master. My sons are named Alexander and Rufus. When Paul went to Ephesus he took Alexander as one of his companions. A great tumult concerning the worship of Diana was caused there, so much so that Paul's friends prevailed on him not to imperil his life by facing the multitude. And it was my son, as our friend Luke has recorded in his journal, who was set forth to explain the Christian faith to the multitude. Again, if you have read Paul's letter to the church at Rome, you must have noted what he said of my house. 'Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.' For you see, not only had my second son shown his devotion to Christ's cause, but my beloved wife had so cared for Paul in his sickness when he tarried here that he regarded her almost as his own mother.

"As I look back, I marvel at the blessings which have been bestowed on me. And they are mine because I carried the cross that day. Had I refused, possibly I would have died by a Roman spear thrust. Certainly I would have missed the joy of knowing Christ, of seeing my dear ones brought under his sway, and the

privilege of serving him would not have been ours. In perhaps another sense, it is true of you and of all men. The Master bade his friends, in proof of their love, to take up their cross and follow him. Assuredly, as they do so, the glorious companionship and inspiring presence of their Redeemer shall be theirs. How rich the blessings life may also hold, none can tell. For, again, as I say, suppose I had failed him that day, suppose I had withheld my strength from his need, how much less glad would my life have been! Do you not think me well repaid for what I did that day? And so shall all men be, for his grace is sure!"

## XVI

## THE STORY OF SIMON PETER

ON the Appian Way, leading from the ancient city of Rome, we came upon an old man, seated as though fatigued almost to death. A youth was standing, somewhat impatiently, by his side, and as we approached, we begged leave to talk to the aged one. We had recognized him. It was Simon Peter. If only we could prevail on him to relate what he knew of the Galilean, we were sure he could a tale unfold.

"Right gladly," he responded, as we made our request. "There remains only a short time to me, and there are many things yet to be told."

"There is nothing we would hear more readily," we answered. "Your recollections of those days, so great in privilege, would enrich all men."

"Then, let me begin just where the Spirit prompts me. Those days when I was a fisherman with my brother, Andrew, can be of but little interest to any but myself. And yet I must speak of them. He was hard to understand—my brother. He had become a follower of John the Baptist. And it vexed me sorely that Andrew seemed to be more interested in the words of the desert preacher than in the work of the boat. I told him so—yes, more than once. And then, one day,

with excited face and trembling voice, he hastened to me, telling of the discovery he had made. The Prophet of Galilee, he said, was none other than the Messianic One. I bade him take me to see for myself. And in that hour I was mastered by this great Teacher, whose name was already on the lips of all.

"It was then that Jesus called me to become a fisher of men. And while the words sounded strange indeed to my ears, and while it meant leaving all our trade to others, I could not withhold my allegiance from him. But I would not mislead you. Pray do not think that I was blind to the sacrifices entailed. Yet I quieted my mind by assuring myself that if, as indeed I believed, the Master had come to bring the kingdom once more to Israel, we had nothing to lose, and much to gain, by sharing his travail.

"I was slow of heart to grasp all he said. I believed that it was for temporal power that he had come. And it cut me to the heart, many a time, to see how short-sighted, as I deemed matters, my Master was. He was too generous. I knew better than he—or so I thought. These people whom he helped, cured, and blessed, should be allowed to make some payment for all the services he rendered. But poor though we were, ofttimes hungry and without even a roof to cover us at nightfall, he would take nothing from them. Nay, he appeared to glory in the fact that, not for gain, but merely for love's sweet sake, had he aided them.

"Chance after chance of securing popular favor came

his way. He ignored them all. I remember one occasion when the people were so enthusiastic that they wanted to make him king by force. But to my chagrin he turned aside from the proffered honor as though it were a prize of little worth. Again, on that memorable day when he rode into Jerusalem, there was an opportunity the like of which we had never seen. You may have heard of it. The Master was mounted upon an ass. And at once the dense crowd of pilgrims, making their way up to the holy city for the Passover, grasped the significance of the event. It is written in our sacred scriptures by Zechariah, the prophet, 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion . . . behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass.' The people were swept mightily by a wave of spiritual fervor. Some of them stripped off their robes to carpet the way. Others tore down branches of the palm trees, and waving them exultantly, raised the triumphant shout, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." It was wonderful! The hearts of my companions beat high with hope, as did mine. The whole city turned out to greet him. We likewise shared in the glory of the hour. It seemed that the kingdom had indeed come!

"Ignoring those who criticized him for what they called an unseemly outburst, the Master wended his way to the Temple. The open courtyard and the cloisters were noisy with the strident voices of the money changers and sellers of doves. Taking a scourge of

cords, Jesus drove out these cheating, lying hucksters whose presence was an abomination to a place so sacred.

"I will not trouble you further with the events of that week except that last evening we spent with him in the Upper Room. I would give my right hand now could I but undo what I did there, and yet the worst was to follow. We gathered in the guest chamber to eat the Passover. We had walked from Bethany, and we were all disappointed and tired. I suppose that is what made us so stupidly intolerant toward each other. We wrangled about who was to have the place of honor nearest to our Lord as we sat at meat. We had disregarded the custom of our people which required that the feet should be laved after a journey, because not one of us would demean himself by acting as servant to the rest. And yet he, the Christ of God, did humble himself to that most menial task, and stooped to wash our unworthy feet.

"As we partook of the Paschal Meal, he read a deeper meaning into it than it had conveyed before. We had thought only of the lambs slain by our fathers in Egypt in that distant day, and the blood sprinkled on the lintel and sideposts of the doors. But now our eyes did dimly behold the Lamb of God, a sacred sacrifice for the whole race. Do not misunderstand me. None of us fully took in his meaning then. It was only afterward that we apprehended what he meant. But when he spoke of the suffering and death lying before him, when he said that he would be forsaken not only by his

countrymen, but also by us, his comrades, I confess I was indignant. I was almost beside myself with inward rage. I could not speak for the others; I could answer only for myself. Loudly I protested against the small faith he had in me. I vowed that, no matter what the others might do, I would stand by him to the end. Then he turned his eyes upon me. A sad smile lit up his face as he shook his head solemnly and said, 'Verily, I say unto thee, that before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice.' I was filled with astonishment, mingled with grief, but I refrained from adding to what I had already said. My pride was wounded, but I was fully resolved that I would prove to my Master that he was mistaken.

Shortly afterward we left the Upper Room, crossed the Kidron, and made our way to the garden which the Master loved so well. He took three of us apart to hold watch with him while he prayed. But something in the soft air of the night, added to the fatigue of the day, lulled me to sleep. I had intended merely to close my eyes for a moment. But three times he came and found us fast asleep. There was a gentle remonstrance in his tone as he said, 'Could ye not watch with me an hour?' It seemed as though he were speaking particularly to me, although, indeed, the words were addressed to all three of us. And before I could collect my senses, there came the gleam of flashing torches, the trampling of feet through the brush, and Judas, the black-hearted, had betrayed our Master to his foes.

"I was not altogether unprepared for some attack. What Jesus had said earlier in the evening about a traitor in the midst had set me thinking. Making some excuse, I had slipped out of the room, and unknown to my brethren, I had obtained a short sword from the good man of the house. This I had concealed beneath my garments. When, therefore, I saw one of the high priest's guards seize my Lord, I drew the blade and made one fierce cut at the fellow's head. It would have cloven his skull in two had he not stepped swiftly aside. As it was, it almost severed his right ear. But again the Master acted in so unexpected a way that I was left amazed. Commanding me lay aside my weapon, he touched the man's ear, and it was healed. Then turning to his captors, he urged that, as he would voluntarily surrender to them, his friends should be allowed to go free. The moment this was agreed to, we took to our heels. To my lasting shame be it said, I, who had vowed never to desert him, I who had spoken so stoutly of my loyalty, proved to all mankind that I was no better, but verily worse than the rest.

"The arrest effected, the party moved off toward the city. Without any definite purpose in mind, I followed. I knew that Jesus was being taken to the High Priest's palace, and shortly afterward I found myself one of a number gathered around the outer gate. Fortunately, I met John of Zebedee who, having been accustomed to go there in the former days, had no great difficulty in securing admission to the courtyard. I could not help

noticing that, while the portress admitted John without question, she eyed me curiously. I fancied she was somewhat suspicious. However, I was so anxious to know what the Master's foes intended doing that I was prepared to take any risk.

"John left me in the shadows while he went aside to make inquiries of his own. In the center of the courtyard, a small group clustered about an open fire. It comprised some of the servants, I supposed, and two or three of the Temple guards who were off duty. I could see that they were talking with considerable animation. And so, thinking I might glean some facts of what was going on, I sauntered over as though I desired to warm myself. I had not been there long before the portress who had admitted me came up. She had an impudent air, tossing her head jauntily as she walked. I noticed her again staring at me, and suddenly she said, 'Thou also wast with him.' I was so taken by surprise that I contradicted her flatly, and rising to my feet strode away. I knew instantly that I had made a mistake. Such a step was bound to arouse fresh suspicion. So, as soon as I saw the girl return to her post at the gate, I strolled back to the fire trying to appear at ease.

"To my intense discomfort, a second girl drew near, and looking me up and down insolently, she also accused me of being one of Christ's followers. A soldier who had crossed over to warm himself, hearing my protests, pointed an accusing finger at me. 'Did I not see thee with him in the garden?' he demanded. And while I

was endeavoring to prove he was mistaken, another, hearing the accent with which I spoke, proclaimed me a Galilean. I was furious. I was like a trapped animal trying to escape. To my lasting shame and dishonor, with oaths and curses, I vehemently denied that I even knew Jesus. Oh, blame me not too unmercifully! Judge me not harshly. None but my Lord and I know how I suffered for it all. At that very moment, a door opened and the Master, in charge of an armed guard, passed by. Our eyes met, I saw the love and pity in them, and in a passion of remorse I fled through the night.

"Hour after hour, I wandered about the outskirts of the city. I could not get away from that grief-stricken face, nor from the denunciations of an outraged conscience. Broken-hearted and weary, I made my way back to the city. I came across a mob, wildly gesticulating, as it circled around a troop of Roman soldiers. The sun glinted upon their helmets and the steel points of their lances. Yet, even from that distance, I caught a glimpse of One carrying a cross. I knew what it meant—none needed to tell me. The voice within condemned me for the dastardly desertion and denials with which my high-sounding words had been followed. You know how craven I was. And even then, with the last act of that tragedy about to be enacted, I dared not own him as my Lord before that implacable crowd.

"Taking pains to conceal my face as much as possible,

I stood at last on a little knoll beyond the fringe of the people massed there, and looked on. I cannot describe the anguish of that hour as I saw those hands, which had always been outstretched to enrich and bless, nailed to the cruel tree. For hours, like one rooted to the spot, I remained. It was only after a pall of inexplicable darkness overspread the sky, relieved only by blinding flashes of lightning, that I was emboldened to go nearer.

"Fear had gripped the crowd. There was a wild rush back to the city. Only a little knot of spectators remained. Mary the stricken mother, Mary Magdalene, my fellow-disciple, John, and a few more waited until, from those divine lips came the words, 'It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

"I cannot tell you with any degree of certainty now what took place between then and the Resurrection morn. I was like one in a daze. All my hopes were dashed to the ground. I had seen him whom I believed to be the Christ of God crucified like a felon, and the divine Father had not intervened. I had seen him, the Lord of life, clutched by the spectral hand of death. And then to add to my astonishment and confusion of mind, came the tidings that he had risen from the dead. I questioned it, although I was compelled, in some strange manner, to believe it. And then to the witness of the empty tomb was the irrefutable evidence of his Presence in the midst of us, his faithless but chosen friends.

"Still, if that were so, you will perhaps ask, why did

I apparently abandon Christ's cause, and go back to my boat and my former craft? That was proof of my indecision. It was not that I doubted Jesus and the reality of his risen life. It was rather that I doubted myself. His heart might conceivably be great enough to forgive my abominable defection; I could never forgive myself. And so until I could determine what my future course should be, I sought relief upon the lake, where with the heaving boat beneath my feet, and the swelling sails above my head, I felt more in my natural environment. I was unworthy, shamefully unworthy, of a love and confidence like his. If he did not know the depths of ignominy to which I had sunk nor the baseness of my conduct, then I did. No longer could I count myself among his friends. And yet—you must believe it—I did honor and love him with all the passion of a man who having found had also lost! Those hot words of mine sprang only from my foolish and arrogant lips; they did not express what my heart felt.

"Be that as it may, we went fishing. A curse seemed to be upon us that night. We tried hour after hour, changing from place to place, where many a time we had found fish before. But it availed nothing. Dawn streaked the sky. Day was at hand. I was angry beyond words. Was my life to be shadowed by my misdeeds right to the end? Savagely I turned the boat's prow to land. And there stood a familiar form. Was it the Lord himself, or only a vision? I leaped over

the gunwale and swam ashore, for there was that within me that scourged me to know the truth.

"It was indeed our divine Master. He broke bread with us, bringing to us all those searing memories of the last meal we had eaten together in the Upper Room. Then his hand was laid on my arm. I felt him leading me apart from the rest. In that voice I knew so well, he asked quietly, those luminous eyes reading my face, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?' I said unto him, 'Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.' He saith unto me, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to me again the second time, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' I replied, 'Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.' He said unto me, 'Feed my sheep.' A third time he said unto me, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' I was grieved because he had repeated this question, already answered. I said unto him, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.' Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee thither thou wouldest not.'

"There is little need to detain you longer, my friend. The tale of my years is almost told even as I know my course is well-nigh run. Yet the glow of his divine forgiveness has never left my heart. I need not speak of my journeyings far and wide in fulfilment of the

commission intrusted to me. But it was with an urgent desire to prove by deeds, rather than by words, that I had found anew the mighty driving force which redemptive love imparts to the soul. Pentecost, in prison at Jerusalem, before the Sanhedrin, and my intercourse with Cornelius, the centurion—these events are, without doubt, familiar to you. They are indelibly stamped upon my mind. Yet in all these abundant labors we were surpassed by the devotion of our friend and fellow-worker, Paul, of Tarsus.

"The long record of progress and victory was not without its price. Under the rule of the infamous Nero, the persecution which I had feared, the fiery trial of which I had written to my Christian friends, broke out. The fire of Rome was the signal for the outburst. I cannot tell you the full tale of the emperor's perfidy and malicious spite. But, hearing that we Christians were for the most part poor and uninfluential folk, he laid the blame for that devastating conflagration at our door. We were powerless to resist. A huge amphitheater was built in the capital. Wild beasts were procured. The governors vied with each other to obtain the largest number of Christians from their provinces. Young and old, men and women, slaves and those free-born, were brought together, herded like the beasts themselves.

"The great festival began"—

The aged apostle suddenly stopped. He covered his

eyes with his hands, as though to exclude the spectacle which memory had conjured up.

"Speak no more of these things," we intervened, moved at the sight of his emotion.

"Nay, but I must," he replied. "I must, or I would withhold the honor due to their fidelity. I must, or the world would be poorer by reason of such heroism unchronicled. They marched into the arena as befitted not victims, but victors. So did my trusty helper, John Mark, inform me. They were sewn up in the skins of dogs, but nothing could daunt their courage. Listen to this! Before the imperial box, where sat that incarnation of infamy, Nero, they ranged themselves. Yea, even as the gladiators saluted the emperor ere the mists of death veiled their eyes, these valiant souls raised their voices in praise of the Christ, the Living One. Horror on horror followed. Let me not talk of it. Those ghastly days were exceeded only by those nights when that monster set others of our brethren upraised on poles, clad in garments steeped in pitch, and fired to light his royal gardens. And I—God forgive me!—I was in hiding!

"Foolishly had I given heed to those who begged me to take pity on myself because of my age. Truly, I reasoned that I must think of those who needed counsel and instruction in the faith. As if there were not others who could fulfil that necessary task! Howbeit, I did for months remain concealed from our ruthless foes, ministering to those who went forth to die, and

also to the unhappy friends they left behind. But at length a warning reached me. They regarded me as the ringleader of the sect, and orders had been given for my arrest. Therefore, my friends urged that I must take refuge in flight. I omitted to tell you—though, of course, you have surmised it—that I had been living on the outskirts of Rome, the better to aid our stricken people.

"Well, if you will bear with me a few moments longer, it was only last night that I yielded to those entreaties and left the imperial city. Plans had been laid for me. I was to go down to Antium, where a ship would shortly set sail for Sicily. Nazarius, this youth by my side, was to guide me there. We set off under cover of darkness, keeping far from the abodes of men until we reached the highway—the Appian Way—where you have found me. Day had just broken. The mists were slowly rising, like filmy draperies, from the shoulders of the hills when a strange thing befell me. Would you hear without doubting my words?"

"Yea, and gladly," we hastened to reply.

"Then listen! Here, on this very road, not two hours since, I saw a light of surpassing brilliance moving toward us. I could not make it out. Amazed at the sight, I questioned the boy, but he thought me dreaming as I walked, for he answered that he saw nothing. But I did! And, presently, from out of that circle of radiance stepped the form beloved, the Christ

of God. I fell on my knees at his feet, beseeching him to tell me what it meant, and asking, 'Whither goest thou, O Lord?' He looked me full in the face. It was the searching gaze I knew so well. I had seen it when he knelt to wash our feet that last night. I had seen it when he passed me there by the fire in the courtyard of Caiaphas.

" 'Whither go I?' he repeated. 'As thou art forsaking thy friends and mine, I go to Rome to be crucified again; yea, there to die with those who are daily proving themselves faithful unto death.'

" 'Thou shalt not,' I exclaimed. 'Be it far from thee, Lord. See! I will not fail thee again. I shall return there, and that instantly!'

"That is why, O my friend, you find me here upon this road. But I now journey with my face toward that place of suffering, and not toward the sea. Yet, as you behold, I am now aged. The way is long and my feet grow weary. I must rest awhile ere I travel farther. Still, have no fear for me now. I have seen the Christ again, my risen Master and my Lord, and I dare not fail him or my brethren now. As I have counseled others, so do I seek to be obedient unto the light intrusted to me from heaven. Let me, I pray you, recall those words to you. They will also stand you in good stead. Believe, my friend, 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found

unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. . . . Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' "

## XVII

## THE STORY OF THE INNKEEPER OF BETHLEHEM

WE had concluded our business with Shammuz, the wealthy trader of Jerusalem. And we were seated in his luxurious home. The costly rugs bestrewing the marble floor, the fragrant breath of spices burning in concealed braziers, and the music of the fountain in the courtyard, gave the house an air of opulence which we could not fail to notice. Outside, the afternoon sun was blazing relentlessly on the narrow streets. But within, all was coolness and quiet. We watched the face of our host as we sought an opportunity to turn the conversation into another channel.

"Did you, by any chance, know the Galilean whose fame was so great in these parts?" we asked, at length.

Shammuz looked up in surprise. That one from afar should inquire of the Preacher seemed unusual.

"The Galilean?" he countered. "Nay, I saw him once or twice, although in truth I knew him not. That is, I never spoke with him. Yet if you seek tidings of him, you are favored of Heaven."

"You speak in riddles," we remarked. "How may that be?"

Shammuz rose from the divan and crossed to the

casement, overlooking the market place. Then he said: "Yonder sits one who can tell of strange happenings, should he be so disposed. At times, he talks freely. Then again, when the mood so moves him, he will say nothing. On the contrary, he drives away those who seek to question him, and with scorn and burning reproaches bids them leave him in peace. A curious fellow, indeed."

We looked in the direction indicated. Within the shadow of a tattered awning sat an aged man. His face was tanned and wrinkled. He was listening to the bartering going on between a seller of rugs and a would-be purchaser, and his gnarled fingers were stroking the flowing white beard which fell upon his breast.

"Who is he?" we asked. "Does he always spend his days listening to the talk of the traders?"

"Why, all men know Jeshua," came the reply. "He was the innkeeper of Bethlehem for many a year. Now he lives with his daughter in Jerusalem. Yet he loves to be where the merchants gather that he may hear their talk. Besides, some of them have lodged at his inn. Go speak with him, my friend, if you would hear his tale. At least, your ears will be tickled by his wit—should he see fit to talk of what he knows."

"We thank you, O Shammuz. We will do so."

Taking our leave of the merchant, we walked across the market place, and saluted the venerable old man.

"Greeting, O Jeshua of Bethlehem! Nay, do not rise. It is we who come to sit at your feet. Last night,

we slept at a hostelry once famed for its host. Like lingering fragrance such as spices yield the memory of your care of passing travelers abides. We have sought you out to tell you so."

Jeshua grunted. Then raising his hand deprecatingly he replied, "You have well spoken. Manon, my father, built that inn, and I took up his task, and for fifty years I served, as did he, the needs of men. If only my son—"

"You have a son, then?" we inquired.

"Yea, but one little worthy of the name—no longer a youth, and yet always a youth in mind. Would he tarry where I labored? Would he be at men's beck and call? Nay; he would rather join those idle fellows who tend the sheep. 'O father Jeshua,' he would say as I reproached him, 'let those who like it have the prison walls of an inn to inclose them. I want to range the vales of Judea, where the winds blow and the stars peer forth by night.' And to think that my inn should pass to strangers!"

Garrulous with age, Jeshua rambled on. We, however, saw our chance.

"Full many a man of note has been sheltered in that abode of yours. Embassies from afar; mayhap King Herod himself has honored your house with his presence? Is that so?"

Jeshua, not ill-pleased at the remark, replied, "Nay; now your tongue runs wildly. Herod slept not beneath

my roof. And yet a king, as some have said, was once born there."

Concealing the thrill of interest we felt, we asked, "Born beneath your roof? What king would seek Bethlehem as his birthplace! Would he not be encompassed with royal purple and marble courts?"

"You are altogether foolish," retorted Jeshua, bridling up. "What man can seek any place wherein to be born? If you will listen, verily, I can tell you that which, strange though it may sound, is nonetheless true. I, Jeshua, alone can tell you of him that was born in yonder inn at Bethlehem."

Having successfully lured the old man on, we settled down to hear his story.

"It is even as you said," went on the innkeeper. "This king was not born under my roof. Yet he was, as one might say. It was in the khan where the cattle rest. Nay; look not so unbelieving. It is even so. And I shall yet tell you that at which you may truly wonder.

"Some forty years ago—it must be so, though it seems to be but yesterday—Caesar Augustus, whom God requite for his deeds!—demanded a census of our nation. And for this purpose, every man had to return to the city of his fathers. From north to south, from east to west, many journeyed. Glad were the hearts of those of us whose livelihood was to afford shelter to the traveler.

"Now, in the city of Bethlehem stands the inn where

I carried on the work of my father. And right merry was my heart at the sight of wayfarers from afar who sought food and rest. Most of them were of goodly stock. They knew the means whereby the rough places of life are made easy, and their purses were well filled. So also was my house! Truly, not since the days of David were our streets so crowded. It was good that one were accustomed to meet the clamant calls of the passer-by, or one would have been driven mad by the throng demanding hospitality. But that is not what you wish to hear.

"It was long past evening, when there came a knock at my door. Have you ever thought how a man reveals himself by his manner of knocking? Of course not! Well, there is the fierce hammering of him who travels in the king's name; none may brook his anger should he be kept unduly without. There is the firm, confident hand of the merchant who can pay for what he requires, and requires what he pays for. Then there is also the timid tapping of him who has but slender means, and is anxious that he should be accepted with good grace. But, another time we may talk of that.

"That night, came the sound of one who was in need, yet who was afraid that his coming might be untimely, as indeed it was. Have I not already told you? The hour was late, and the inn full. No messenger of the emperor, nor merchant's hand knocked thus. I mused, as I turned to the door. It was like the sound of a suppliant. Yea; and by the light of the lamp as I stood

at the portal I saw that I was right. It was a man from the north country. His garb showed that. Moreover, I knew by his speech that he was from Galilee even before he told me his name. He came, said he—for the bidding of the Roman none dare disobey—to be enrolled in the city of his fathers. But the way had been sore and long, and his wife was faint. Thus they had journeyed slowly, for they had been hindered by the throngs. Men's desire to reach the gates before nightfall, as you can understand, was hot within them. And this was the stranger's request. Could he find shelter for his wife and for himself?

"That sounded fair to my ears, for—it was my pride as it is now my shame—I loved to bargain where I could. There might, I reasoned, be two whom I could well turn out were I to be recompensed aright. So, naming the sum which would warrant me finding room for them, I waited. But it was in vain! This man, Joseph, shook his head. He was poor—a carpenter, forsooth! Then as he turned away, something struck his dull mind. He came back, and whispered in mine ear. Well did I know his guile. To take in the woman would mean that he would later demand a place so that he might shield her from harm. But I would have none of them. He had said that he himself would be well content with a bed of straw in the stable. Why, then, let him and his wife take it. Was not the place large enough for them both? And besides, they were only peasant-folk."

"You sent the woman there in her plight?" we queried.

"Yea; but misjudge me not. Wait, and you shall hear all. How did I know that this man spoke truly? Besides, the hour was late. I was weary, and I had to be astir betimes. You have forgotten what duties lay upon me. Again that night, a few hours later, my door resounded with the beating of hands. I listened, resolved at first to let them knock. Then thinking of their anger should the guests be disturbed, I went forth from my bed. This time it was Eleazar, my son. With him were certain other shepherds. But before I could demand what senseless folly had brought him to my door, he cried, 'Jeshua, my father, where is he—the king?' I thrust him aside, and sought to close the door. Doubtless, the lad was hot with some folly. 'King?' I said angrily. 'Would you were as concerned for your kin. Begone! get back to those silly sheep; they are fit company for such as you.' Yet the lad was not to be silenced. He told of a sight on which none may look and still live. May Jehovah forgive me, but such was my thought! It was a vision of angels which they had seen on the hillside. The darkness of that Syrian night had been swallowed up by light celestial. Clear as the voice of a herald, said they, one had proclaimed, 'I bring you good tidings of great joy. . . . For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' Then followed a great burst of angelic music. And the burden of their

song was, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'

"Well I knew that the lad had been witless, irresponsible, and vain. He had proved that in refusing to follow his father's trade. But now I deemed him mad. Yet when I bade him go and dream again, he demanded of his fellows if he did not speak the sober truth. I was bitter of tongue, and I answered, 'You did well in coming to your father for news of the city. Little happens that I do not learn. Yet no king, least of all the Christ, has been born here in Bethlehem.'

"They seemed convinced at length. Then, by some strange chance, there came back to me the whispered words of that traveler to whom I had given shelter in the khan. Could it be that Eleazar spoke of them? But how could that be? What king was ever born in such a place? It was even as you have said. However, to satisfy myself, yea, also to quiet my own soul, I led the way to the stable, and bade them follow. A dim light was burning therein. As we peered inside, lo! there was the young mother. A babe lay upon her breast, and Joseph stood looking with fixed gaze upon them both. I turned to speak to my son, but he had fallen upon his knees. The others stood by in rapt wonderment. The very dogs which had followed them from the fields seemed to sense that which none might explain. A hundred questions clamored for answer within my brain. Then beckoning to the others, we returned to the house. It was no place for us. What

we had looked upon, yea, and that which also I had heard from their lips, left me amazed. To Sarah, my wife, I gave the news of the child's birth, though there was no need to impart to her the tidings which our son had brought. It was a time for deeds, not words. Then, leaving the men to go back to their flocks, I sought my rest.

"Sleep was impossible! The words of that careless lad rang in my ears: 'A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'—Could it be that the shepherds were mistaken? They could not all have dreamed the same thing! Yet, perchance, Eleazar had been filling their minds with his weird fancies. He was ever one to let his thoughts run riot.

"But, as I was saying, I could not sleep. Then, for the third time that night, came the sound of eager hands on my door. Anger filled my heart! If Caesar's edict meant that one must obey man's summons night and day, life were too toilsome to endure. Let them knock, said I to myself. Again I thought of the wrath of the guests from whose eyelids sleep was driven, and so of necessity I went forth. Day had dawned as I flung open the door. And in the dim light, I beheld the strangest figures I have ever seen. Three men were there. Two bestrode their camels, while one stood imperiously before me. He demanded to know where the King of the Jews lay!

"I could not at first find words to answer him. My eyes were fixed upon these visitors from afar. All

three were gorgeously clad as befitting those who would do homage to a king. I took it all in instantly—the jeweled turbans, the shimmering silk of their robes, the fine trappings of their beasts. What could one say?"

"What indeed?" we replied. "You told them that no King of the Jews was born in Bethlehem?"

"Nay; I thought it wise to leave them to answer their own questions. I asked them to follow me. But even as I walked to the stable, my mind was filled with misgiving. They might perhaps think I was playing a sorry jest upon them. What if they fell upon me in anger? But I resolved to show them the babe, and tell them that the child had been born that very night. Yet whether he were a king or not, none but the wise could say!

"My fears, however, were baseless! They dismounted without a word at the entrance to the khan. Then, as though they had forgotten my presence, they passed in. I caught Sarah's eye, and with unaccustomed obedience to my will she withdrew. Together we watched. The three went forward, doing obeisance to the child as unto the great Caesar himself. What they said we could not hear, but from their robes, each drew forth that which they unwrapped with great care. Again prostrating themselves before the babe and his mother, they laid their gifts before him. We saw what they were. There was an offering of gold, another of frankincense, and a third of myrrh. It flashed through

my mind that these were gifts ill-fitting a child born of peasant parents. Since then, as I have pondered the matter, I have wondered if it were indeed a king—the King of the Jews—whom they thus had sought and found!"

"And what do you think now? Do you believe that they were divinely led? Was this the king of our race?"

"That too I have meditated upon through the passing years. Eleazar's story of the angelic vision I might have dismissed as a vain fancy were it not for these men. For, hearken! I have told you no idle tale; and if mine be true, why not his? Besides—but I weary you? You must pursue your way?"

"Not until you have told us all. Speak on, Jeshua."

"Well, not many days after, came one who told of what Herod had done. These three men who had visited the inn that night had deemed that the palace of the king could alone shelter one born of the royal house. Following a wondrous star, they had first gone to the abode of Herod the Great. There they had asked for news of the babe born to sovereignty. The king was plainly disturbed. You can understand why?"

"Truly! Was not Herod's father an Edomite, for whose services Pompey had made him governor of Palestine? This office reverted to his son, Herod, who went to Rome, where, by a judicious use of bribes and flattery, he gained the title of the King of the Jews."

"That is right." Jeshua spoke bitterly, and then spat

contemptuously on the ground. "A king by bribery must always fear a king by birth! Yea, Herod was afraid lest there might be indeed a king born of the true line. So he summoned the Elders. He was, as you may know, supposedly a convert to our faith. He therefore knew something of our Scriptures, and demanded where this Messianic Prince should be born when Jehovah fulfilled his promise to our nation. The answer was given. And the depth of his subtilty can be seen in what followed. He ordered those who had come to honor the divine king, to go to Bethlehem, to find the child, and then to return to the palace that he might also know where the babe was."

"And did they?"

"Have you never heard that the three were wise men? They found the child. But instead of going back to Herod, they took another course homeward. Although they had suspected the king's duplicity, they could not thwart his wicked purpose. He noted the time when the child was born. Then he issued his decree. All children under the age of two years were ruthlessly slaughtered. That was Herod's way. He slew his own sons because he feared them. Yea, it was rumored that Caesar once said, with biting humor, that he would rather be one of Herod's swine than his son!"

"Yea, so we have heard," we answered. "But what did the guests say next day? Did you tell them of these strange happenings? It seems hard to believe

that none should have passed the night without offering to yield place to those pilgrims."

"That also will I speak of. You will laugh when you hear of their diverse moods. There was one, Cushi—if I recall his name aright. He was a spice merchant from Damascus, and one of right bitter speech. I remember that well. He protested with such violence that, if the walls had ears, as some say, they would have been deafened by his fury. 'Never did I spend so long and wearisome a night,' said he. 'Did I not covenant with you for a place to sleep? Then will I pay nothing, for lo! slumber has not visited my eyes. It is monstrous that an honest man should be thus mistreated.'

"And I replied, for my temper was hot, 'If you are an honest man, you will pay what you owe. I covenanted with you neither for sleep nor rest, but only for shelter.' "

The old man laughed silently at the recollection of his shrewdness.

"You see, I was careful to frame my words aright. But even as I was explaining the thrice-repeated blows upon my door, another spoke up. He was Beniah, also a merchant of the same city, and no friend of Cushi. He pretended to be likewise wroth, but I saw an eyelid droop while he unburdened himself.

" 'Why did you not find lodgment for this poor mother and her babe?' he asked. 'That the house was full signifies nothing. There were some I know who

might have found good fellowship and intelligence akin to their own with the asses and cattle.'

" 'And, pray, what does that mean?' inquired Cushi. He was a man of dull wit, but much pride. But the question remained unanswered, for another who stood by, purse in hand to pay what was due, spoke to us all. He was one who had often stayed at my inn. His name was Shealtiel, a venerable man of good repute, and a deep student of our sacred writings.

" 'Is it not written that out of Bethlehem should the Anointed come?' he inquired. 'What if this child born here last night were he? What did you say, Jeshua, of the strange men who came, and of the costly gifts they offered to this babe?'

"I was about to repeat what I had already said when Cushi raised his hand for silence.

" 'These are but old wives' tales. Is it not also written that he should be a Prince of David's house? Yet Jeshua has already avowed that they were but common people—and from Galilee. How do you answer that?'

"I was no longer able to stay. Taking the silver from Cushi's unwilling hands, I left them to their disputings, for I had much to do. Yea, moreover, I was also weary of their words. But let me tell the rest of my story, lest you also grow weary."

"That can never be," we replied. "But what of the child? What became of him? We would hear more."

"Truly, could I with certainty tell you more, I would myself be happier in my age. What I know is only

hearsay. Since that night when I turned his parents from my door, peace has been a stranger to my heart. Would that I could undo what I did, or do what I left undone! The child? Some have freely said that he escaped the sword only to find a cross. I cannot tell. It is that which troubles me. By night, they say, he was taken into the south lands, where he remained until Herod's wrath was extinguished by the waters of death. Then he went to the home of Joseph, in distant Galilee. Long years have passed since then, and I do not recall anything of his doings at that time, except that he was known as the carpenter's son. But one did come who declared himself the forerunner of the Christ. He was known to Eleazar, my son. The lad heard him speak of the Messiah, and he told this Baptist what he had seen in those early days—of the vision of angels, and of a child born in his father's stable. The preacher did not seem surprised. It was even as though he already knew the story.

"Then later, I have heard, that same child came forth from the silent years to speak of the kingdom of God. Verily, I intended to journey to his side and ask whether he were indeed the same. Yet there were many coming and going in those days. Trade with the south was increasing. Caravans were continually passing my way, and the inn required all my strength. Still, I heard many strange things of this Galilean. He was reputed to have power over the ills that torment us. He could give healing to the sick, sight to the blind, life

to the dead. Nay, more, to the troubled soul he could afford peace. They even said that he was the Christ, that his kingdom was at hand, and yet—yet—I wonder how that could be when Jehovah let him die a felon's death?"

"What does Eleazar say?"

"Verily, now that is indeed beyond my power to explain. I am old. Fourscore years, even as has been written, are indeed labor and sorrow if one would unlearn old truths, and learn the new. But what my son believes I have heard from his own lips."

"Concerning this Jesus?"

"Ay, even so! Ten years have passed since he was condemned by our elders, and slain as a deceiver upon the cross. But his friends say that he still lives. Some saw him and talked with him after his death. And he was not as one from the place of shadows. He was rather as the Prince of life. Nor is that all! Many have followed the new way. My son is among them. He has told them of that night in which the babe lay in my stable, and they declare that this Jesus is the same. It is that which sorely troubles me. Can this be the Christ?"

The innkeeper turned his keen eyes upon us.

"Do you sincerely ask that?" we said. "Then if the story is ended, let us speak. We also have studied the Holy Writings of Israel. Like yourself we read there of one who was to come forth of the royal line. The time seemed full ripe for him. And the hour brought

the man! But we have also read the records written by some who had been the Galilean's most intimate friends. They tell how his disciples were often perplexed about the conflict stirred by the teacher and his mighty works. Yet slowly, like the mists which enshroud Hermon, their doubts had faded as with the rising sun. They perceived not only what Jesus did, but also what he was!

"We resolved to search out for ourselves more perfectly the things we had read. Thus we went to Bethlehem. There we learned that you had been the keeper of that inn. And following the directions which one gave to us, at last we came to learn the truth from your own lips. We have succeeded beyond what we could have hoped. This story has answered questions which have long perplexed us. Now do we declare that that child born at your inn is indeed the Christ of God, the long-desired.

Jeshua looked us full in the eyes.

"You have been the messenger of God unto me. Now I understand! The song of the angels, the star, the slaying of the babes—and your testimony. Though once I denied him the shelter of my inn, now shall he have place in my heart! Yea, verily, for this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

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